THE SLEEPY KING

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Sleepy King—*Frontispiece.*

"MY LITTLE QUEEN," HE SAID.

Altemus' Young People's Library

THE SLEEPY KING

A FAIRY TALE

By
AUBREY HOPWOOD and SEYMOUR HICKS

With Seventy-seven Illustrations

PHILADELPHIA
HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

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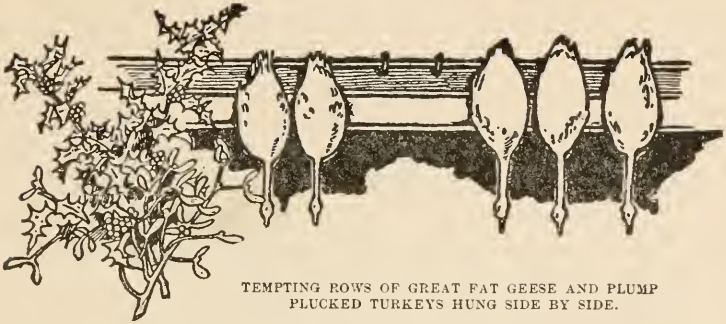


TEMPTING ROWS OF GREAT FAT GEESE AND PLUMP PLUCKED TURKEYS HUNG SIDE BY SIDE.

THE SLEEPY KING.

CHAPTER I.

It was Christmas Eve in London, and the streets were white with freshly fallen snow. All the shop windows were dressed in holiday clothes of evergreens and bright red berries, and lighted up as brightly as ever they could be.

Tempting rows of great fat geese and plump plucked turkeys hung there side by side, waiting to be bought and taken away for to-morrow's dinner; and the busy shopmen were hard at work running in and out, making up parcels for the

people who had money enough to pay for them, and watching that the poor ones did not steal anything. Because there are lots of poor people in London who never have any Christmas dinner at all, unless they can manage to steal one and run away with it, and if you are very hungry this is a great temptation.

On the pavement, outside those lovely windows, there were crowds of poor people looking in and envying the rich ones who could buy whatever they wanted. But the biggest crowd of all was one that had collected outside a toy shop in the Strand. There were such wonderful things in that window: great big dolls with golden hair, and eyes that opened and shut; horses and woolly dogs that moved their heads and walked about when you wound them up; and a clown with a painted face, who had springs inside him, and who could balance his hat on his foot, and kick it up and catch it on his head.

All the little children who stood and looked in at him through the plate-glass window were in love with that clown, and they would have been quite disappointed if any one had bought him and taken him away. But he must have been very expensive; because, often as the shopwoman came and took him down and made him work, she never found a customer for him; and he always came back to his

place, right in the middle of the window. And

AND A CLOWN WITH A PAINTED FACE, WHO HAD SPRINGS INSIDE HIM AND WHO COULD BALANCE HIS HAT ON HIS FOOT.

every time he came back, his little friends on the pavement outside laughed and nodded to him; and

his merry painted face looked as if he quite enjoyed the joke.

One of his admirers was a little flower-girl with a pretty white face, and a frock that was much too thin for that cold night. The little bare legs and feet beneath her ragged petticoat were blue with cold; and she had no hat to cover the masses of long fair hair that hung far down her back; for she was very poor. In the basket which she carried on her arm were half a dozen bunches of violets, and as many boxes of matches, which she was trying to sell.

The people who passed up and down the Strand knew her quite well by sight, and they had christened her "Bluebell," after her favorite flower, although that was not her real name. She was such a gentle, pretty little thing, that sometimes they stopped to buy a bunch of violets, or a box of matches, which they did not really want; just because they were sorry for her and knew that she was quite different from the beggar children who throng the London streets.

But sometimes there were nights when she could not sell anything at all; and when a gruff policeman, new to the beat, would tell her to move on. And then poor little Bluebell was very unhappy; because she was an orphan, and she had two tiny sisters who lived with her in a garret in Drury

Lane; and she was obliged to earn the money which paid their rent and kept them neat and tidy.

Now, on that Christmas Eve, Bluebell was very miserable indeed; because she had been obliged to spend all her little savings in buying the flowers to fill her basket; and she knew that unless she could succeed in selling them, she would have no money to pay her rent, and the little sisters would have to go without their dinner on Christmas day.

She had given them their supper in the garret an hour ago, and made up a nice bright fire with two wooden blocks which a friendly old night-watchman had given her, from the street where they were laying down a new wood pavement. Then she had put the children to bed, and gone out in the hope of finding a customer for her flowers; because she was haunted by a fear that she would find two tiny stockings hanging up on the bed-rail when she got home, just in case Santa Claus had time to look in and put something inside them.

So Bluebell stopped for a minute to nod to her friend the clown in the toy shop window; then she shouldered her basket, and trudged away along the Strand through the slushy snow, looking up into the faces of the passers-by to see whether they looked as if they would help her.

But for a long time nobody would buy anything at all. People don't want violets on snowy nights.

and they won't even take their hands out of their pockets to buy a box of matches. The little girl walked bravely along; she was used to cold and unkindness; wondering how she could manage to pay that rent, and thinking of the splendid things she would buy for the little sisters if only she were rich enough. Now and then she stopped to warm herself on the grating of a cook-shop window; but the smell of frizzling sausages and potatoes made her so hungry that she was forced to hurry on again. And all the time she was watching with eager eyes for her little friend Dicky the shoeblack, with whom she was wont to share her childish troubles; and even, when times were bad with one of them, a meager supper.

Dicky was quite a character in his way, for he had a mania for reading every scrap of newspaper which came within his reach, though much of what he read must have been far beyond his understanding. And it was no uncommon sight to see the little pair, huddled up close together for warmth, in the shelter of a friendly doorway, while Dicky the shoeblack gravely spelled out the news for Bluebell's edification, with his own comments upon it. He went steadily from one end of the paper to the other, working through the news of the day, the racing accounts, and even the political speeches, some of which puzzled them both immensely.

But to-night Dicky was nowhere to be seen, for Bluebell tried all his favorite haunts in vain.

The hour was growing late when she spied a very smart carriage, with a beautiful pair of bay horses, standing beside the pavement. On the box-seat was a very fat coachman with a silver-mounted whip in his hand, and a few yards off a very tall, thin footman stood upon the pavement, waiting impatiently for his master. The carriage looked so warm and comfortable that Bluebell ventured to peep into it. There was nobody inside, but a thick fur rug lay upon the cushions.

"Now then," said a harsh voice at her elbow, "move on. This ain't your carriage, is it?"

Bluebell looked up quickly, and met the eye of the thin footman.

"Perhaps she'd like a ride," said the fat coachman sarcastically, as he winked at his companion and flicked at her with his whip.

"More likely she wants to steal the rug," said the footman, as the little girl hurried away.

She had not gone very far when she spied a fat little old gentleman hurrying along towards her, with a fur coat buttoned up about his ears, and a round red face with a pair of gold spectacles perched upon his nose. He didn't exactly walk, he trotted; and as he trotted he muttered to himself little broken sentences that Bluebell could not

catch. But there was something about the red face and the little twinkling eyes behind the spectacles that looked kind and good-natured. So Bluebell held up her basket to him, and offered him a bunch of violets.

The little old gentleman stopped quite suddenly in his trot and looked into her face.

"Eh, what?" he said, "violets, my dear, violets? What should I do with violets, eh, what?"

"Please, sir, you might wear them," said Bluebell, timidly.

"Might wear them. Oh, yes, I might wear them," answered the little old gentleman. He peered at her through his spectacles for a minute; then he went on, "Cold night, little girl, cold night! Much too late for you to be out. Run away home to bed, home to bed, eh, what?"

His voice was like the rest of him, short and jerky; but so kind that Bluebell took courage.

"I can't go home, sir, till I have sold my flowers," she said.

"All right, little girl, all right; I'll buy them. Buy them all; how much?"

"Only a penny a bunch, sir."

"A penny a bunch, penny a bunch! Much too little, eh, what?" said the old gentleman, and began fumbling in his pockets.

Bluebell looked at him in surprise; she thought

he was laughing at her. But he was a methodical old gentleman, and he pulled out a fat leather purse and peeped into it. Then he looked at her again, and jerked out:

"What's your name, little girl, and where do you live?"

Then Bluebell, who had quite got over her fear of him, told him her address; and he seemed so much interested that she went on to speak of the little sisters, of the rent she could not pay, and the

WHEN SHE SPIED A FAT, LITTLE OLD GENTLEMAN HURRYING ALONG TOWARDS HER.

Christmas dinner she wanted to buy. And the little old gentleman nodded his funny head and peered at her through his spectacles. Then he wrote down something on a piece of paper and took out a small bright coin from his purse, which he slipped into her hand.

"Please, sir, you haven't taken the violets," Bluebell said.

Then the old gentleman spluttered and chuckled inside his fur collar, and took one bunch from her basket and patted her on the shoulder.

"Just one for a keepsake, eh, what?" he said. "Good night, Bluebell; take care of your little sisters."

And he trotted away up the street, while the flower-girl opened her hand where the coin he had given her was clutched tight. She had made sure it was a sixpence, but all of a sudden the light of a street lamp fell upon it, and then she saw it was gold. So she knew that the old gentleman must have made a mistake, and she ran up the street after him so fast that she was quite out of breath when she caught him up.

"Please, sir," she said, "it isn't a sixpence."

The old gentleman stopped and chuckled again. "No, my dear," he said, "it's twenty sixpences. Mind you don't have them stolen. Now then, run away home to bed, eh, what?" And away he

went up the street until he reached the carriage with the bright bay horses. The footman slammed the door and climbed up on to the box, and away went the carriage into the whirling snow, leaving the little girl so surprised that she did not know what to do next. Ten shillings! Bluebell had never had so much money of her own in all her life.

But it did not take her long to make up her mind what to do, and she knew she would have to make haste before the shops were shut up for the night. So she hurried into one little shop after another, and came out with tiny parcels in her hand, which contained the makings of a lovely Christmas dinner for to-morrow. And she did not spend much of her money, because children who live in Drury Lane know how to buy things cheaper than you or I would ever dream of, and a clever little housekeeper can buy a whole Christmas feast for a shilling.

And last of all Bluebell walked boldly into the big toy-shop in the Strand, where the clown lived in the window, and she bought three presents. One was a doll, one was a little toy violin, and the other was a box of colored lights.

When she came out again, she hunted high and low once more for Dicky the shoeblack, but without success, and so she hurried home as fast as her little

bare legs would carry her. And when she got there she went straight to the door of the landlady's room and knocked on it. And Mrs. Hearty—that was the landlady's name—asked her to come in and sit down. And when Bluebell had told her all about the old gentleman, and the ten shillings he had given her, Mrs. Hearty said:

"You are a good little girl, my dear, and I am going to give you a Christmas present too."

For Mrs. Hearty was quite a kind old landlady, and she knew that the flower-girl always paid her regularly every week. So she gave her a kiss, and handed her back the money that Bluebell owed her. And she said that if Bluebell would leave her parcels down-stairs, she would help her to cook the children's Christmas dinner in her own kitchen. And the little flower-girl went up-stairs to her own garret, and thought that was the happiest Christmas Eve she had ever known.

In that little room up-stairs the fire was burning nice and bright; because wooden pavement blocks have lots of tar in them, and they last quite a long time. And the first thing Bluebell saw was two little heads side by side on the pillow, and on the rail at the foot of the bed there were two tiny stockings hanging up, just in case Santa Claus had time to come and fill them. Beside the fireplace

sat the other occupant of the garret, the children's favorite, Peter the cat.

Now Bluebell knew quite well that the children were only pretending, for they were much too excited to go to sleep before she came home. But they kept their eyes tight shut; so she pretended too. And she put the doll into one stocking, and the toy violin into the other, and she filled up the toes with little sugar animals that had bright red eyes and tongues; and then she pinned the box of colored lights between the two, because that was to be

AND MRS. HEARTY—THAT WAS THE LANDLADY'S NAME—ASKED HER TO COME IN.

divided between them. And when she had finished, the children couldn't pretend any more, so they just sat up in bed and looked at those lovely stockings with big round eyes. And Bluebell laughed, and told them to look and see what Santa Claus had sent them.

Then there was all the fun of unpacking the presents; and they found that the doll had clothes that took off, and the fiddle made real music when you pulled the bow across the strings; and they were all as happy as ever they could be. But the box of colored lights they decided to keep till the morning, so as to make fireworks on Christmas Day. And they tasted the sugar animals with the red eyes, and they chattered and laughed until Bluebell told them it was really time to go to sleep.

Then they begged for a story, and they promised to lie down again and keep quiet if she would only read them one. So at last Bluebell took up a ragged old story-book, with its cover torn away, and its pages all thumbed and dog-eared. It was a book of fairy tales, and the children knew them quite well by heart, but they were never tired of hearing them over and over again.

Bluebell sat down on the rickety chair beside the fireplace, where Peter the cat shared the warmth with her, and she turned over the leaves till she

came to the story of the Sleeping King. And this was what she read—

"Once upon a time, in a country miles and

AND THE FIRST THING BLUEBELL SAW WAS TWO LITTLE HEADS SIDE BY SIDE ON THE PILLOW.

miles across the sea, there lived a king. He was a very, very rich king; and he had all the money he wanted, to do whatever he liked with, and much more besides. He lived in a beautiful castle, where

all the chairs and tables were made of gold. But of all his subjects there was not one who loved him, because he was so greedy and avaricious that he never gave away a single penny to the poor.

"And the longer he lived the more he hoarded up his money; until at last he became such a miser that a good fairy, who knew all about the poor people who were starving in his kingdom, determined to punish him for his greed.

"So one night she went to his home, and she spirited him away to a great deep cave that lay under the grounds of his castle, and there she laid a spell upon him. In that hidden cave he was to remain and to sleep, with all his gold and riches piled around him, until he should be found and wakened by a little child.

"And by his side, amongst the gold and the jewels, the fairy left a golden present, to be given by the king to that lucky child who should wake him up and lead him back again to his lost kingdom.

"When his subjects found that he had vanished, they set to work to seek high and low for their king; because, although they hated him, they knew that the castle and all that it contained was his. But, search as they might, they could not find him.

"And so a hundred years went by, and all the

people who had known him died and were buried. But they told their children the story, and another generation set to work to hunt for the vanished king. And another hundred years came and went, but no one ever found the fairy's secret hiding-place, and so the miser king slept on and on——"

Just when Bluebell got to this part of the story a peal of bells began to ring from the church outside, and she knew that it was Christmas morning. She looked at the bed, and there, on the pillow, two little heads were nestled close together fast asleep. And while Bluebell listened to the chiming bells and looked into the dying fire, a very strange thing happened.

The fireplace widened and widened out, and the smoldering embers piled themselves up one above the other, until they made a flight of stairs that led straight up to the back of the chimney, where a large black door gradually appeared.

And while Bluebell watched it in wonderment, some great big letters came twinkling out of the darkness, one by one, like the advertisements she had often seen appear on the walls in Trafalgar Square. She read them out aloud, until the "I" was dotted and the sentence finished. And this was what she saw—

TO THE CASTLE OF THE SLEEPY KING.

Bluebell rubbed her eyes and looked again, but the letters never changed. She turned to the bed, to make sure that her little sisters were fast asleep. Then she thought of the golden present which the fairy had left for that lucky child who should wake up the sleeping king.

And she walked straight up the staircase to the big black door, turned the handle, and went through.

"Bluebell rubbed her eyes and looked again."

CHAPTER II.

Bluebell found herself standing in a great forest that stretched far away for miles behind her. The trees in it were the largest she had ever seen, much bigger than those in Hyde Park, and their branches spread out on each side of them like the branches of a Christmas tree. The ground was white with snow, but it was not in the least like the dirty slushy snow that she was accustomed to in London. It was thick and cotton-woolly, and it did not even make her feet wet. She picked some up in her hand and found that it was quite warm, and made a lovely snowball.

But the strangest thing of all was that Bluebell, though she had never been there before in her life, seemed to be quite at home in this great forest with the warm woolly snow; for she knew, without any one telling her, that she was in the kingdom of the Sleepy King. Perhaps that was because she had read the story so often in the tattered fairy book,

and shown her little sisters the pictures of it. She felt just a little lonely at first, and she would have liked to have her friend Dicky the shoeblack with her. Or even Peter the cat would have been a companion.

But since she was there by herself, she made up her mind to see everything that was to be seen, and to set about finding at once the hiding-place where the Sleepy King had been shut up for two hundred years. So she walked along till she came to the edge of the forest; and there, straight in front of her, she saw a great castle.

AND THE WATERCOCK WAS GOLD, AND AT EACH OF THE CORNERS THERE WAS A HUGE DRAGON.

It was a most wonderful building, with hundreds and hundreds of windows in it, and a flight of marble steps that led up to its great doors, which had hinges made of gold and were all studded with jewels that glittered and twinkled in the sun. The

chimneys were made of silver, and the weathercock was gold, and at each of the four corners there was a huge dragon carved out of marble, with diamond eyes.

In front of it there was a beautiful garden, with yew trees all round it, cut into the shapes of all the animals in a Noah's Ark. There were lions, and elephants, and tigers, and peacocks with spreading tails, and rabbits and guineapigs. And there were fountains that sent up showers of rainbow-colored lights; and the water in them was quite warm, so as not to freeze the gold-fish that swam about in the marble basins underneath.

It was all so beautiful that Bluebell sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree to look at it; and while she sat there, the doors of the castle were thrown open, and six heralds walked down the marble steps, two at a time. They had silver trumpets in their hands, and when they blew upon them the music sounded like a peal of church bells on a Christmas morning.

Directly the trumpets blew, crowds of peasants came hurrying out of the wood, each one with a shovel or pickaxe on his shoulder, and they made their way towards the castle doors. Some of them passed quite close to Bluebell; but they did not seem to notice her, so she sat quite still and waited to see what would happen next. When they were

all gathered round the marble steps, the heralds blew their trumpets again, and all the peasants took off their hats and knelt down on one knee. Bluebell stood up to see whom they were bowing to; and there, on the highest step of all, stood the reigning king himself.

He was a fat little gentleman, with a red face and gold spectacles, and he was dressed in a long purple robe that reached down to his heels, trimmed with fur and braided all over with gold. On his head was a crown of jewels, and in his right hand he held a scepter. When he spoke his voice was so distinct that Bluebell could hear him quite distinctly.

"Have you found the secret hiding-place of the sleeping king, my ancestor?" he asked. "Eh, what?"

And all the peasants answered:

"No, your Majesty. We have searched the forest for miles and miles around, but we can find no trace of it."

Then the king said:

"You must search again to-morrow, and the next day, and the next. You must go on searching till every foot of my dominions has been tried, because all the treasures of my kingdom are buried with my ancestor, and my orders are that they shall be found. For the royal coffers are nearly empty;

and how can I help the poor people of my kingdom while all that gold lies idle and useless? Eh, what?" he concluded with a jerk.

And Bluebell thought what a strange thing it must be to own that wonderful castle, and still not to have money enough to do exactly what you wanted. She was only a little girl, and she did not know that even kings sometimes cannot get what they require. But she liked this king because his first thought was for his poor subjects; and his face was very like one she had seen before.

Then the chief of the peasants answered the king and said:

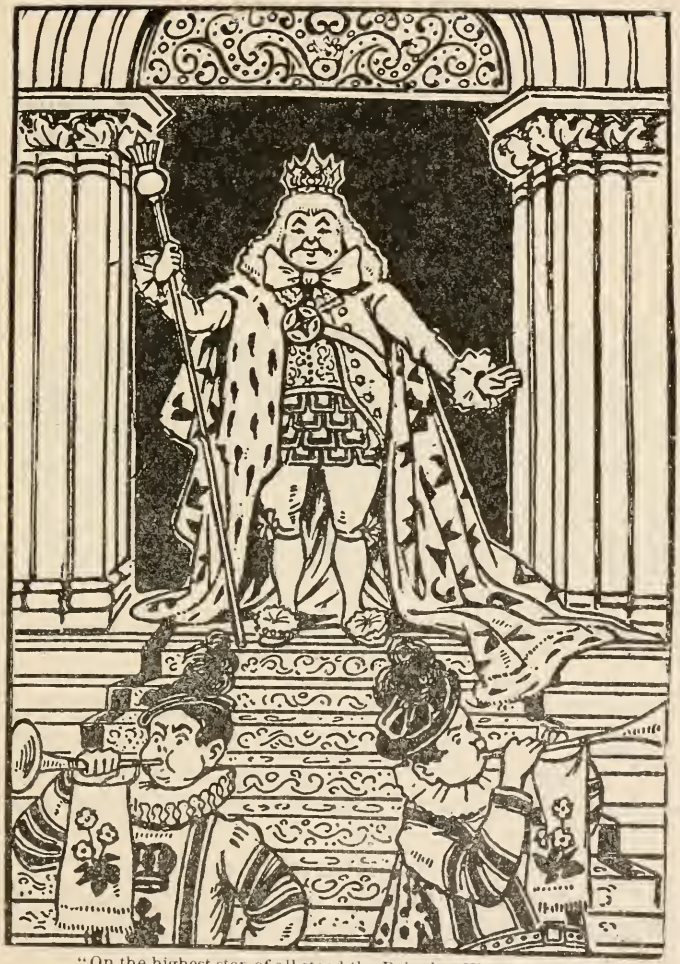
"May it please your Majesty, the Fairy of the Forest, who cast the spell, decreed that your royal ancestor could only be led back to his dominion by the hand of a little child.

And the king answered:

"To-day every child within my kingdom has been bidden to the castle, where a great Christmas tree is ready and waiting for them. It may be that one of them may find that secret hiding-place which you have sought so long in vain."

The heralds blew their trumpets again, and all the peasants trooped away to their homes. Then the king and his servants went into the castle, and the great doors were shut.

When everything was quiet, Bluebell ventured



"On the highest step of all stood the Reigning King himself."

out of the forest into the garden, and began to examine it. She walked round the marble basins, and fed the gold-fish from baskets of bread crumbs that were hung up beside the fountains. And she found that the flower beds were filled with violets, and crocuses, and hyacinths, and bluebells; and that was a very curious thing, because it was

CROWDS OF PEASANTS CAME HURRYING OUT OF THE WOOD, EACH ONE WITH A SHOVEL OR PICKAXE ON HIS SHOULDER.

winter and the snow was on the ground. But the royal gardener was a very clever man, and he had learned how to warm his garden with hot water pipes, so that the flowers should grow there all the year round.

Then Bluebell remembered what the king had said about the Christmas tree, and she wondered whether, if she went up and knocked at the front

door, she would be allowed to go in and see it. She was half inclined to try, because the king had

SHE WALKED ROUND THE MARBLE BASIN, AND FED THE GOLD-FISH FROM BASKETS THAT WERE HUNG UP BESIDE THE FOUNTAINS.

such a kind face that she thought he would not refuse her. But when she looked at her shabby

frock, she grew rather ashamed of it, for she remembered the dresses of the children whom she had seen in London on their way to Christmas parties. Then she determined to wait until the others arrived; for she was a wise little flower-girl, and she did not care to go where she was not wanted. So she found a nice cosy little arbor with a chair and table inside it, and she sat down there, quite out of sight herself, and waited.

In a few minutes the great doors of the castle opened again, and this time Bluebell could see right through them into the hall. It was brilliantly lighted up with thousands and thousands of colored lamps, and in the middle of it there stood the largest Christmas tree that ever was seen. The branches of it spread from one side of the hall to the other, and the top of it went right up to the ceiling; and it was covered all over with lighted candles, yellow, and pink, and blue, and green, but the funniest thing about it was that there were not any presents on it.

Instead, they were arranged on tables all round the hall, and it seemed to Bluebell that every toy she had ever seen in the London shop windows was collected there. While she was wondering why they put them on the tables instead of the branches of the Christmas tree, she heard a sound of laughter and chattering voices coming from the forest.

Then there came down the road and across the garden, where the snow had all been swept away on either side, troops and troops of children ; boys

SHE FOUND A NICE COSY LITTLE ARBOR WITH A CHAIR AND TABLE INSIDE IT.

and girls dressed in smart fur coats and capes that made Bluebell more than ever ashamed of her own shabby frock.

The path through the garden led quite close to the arbor, so that she could see and hear them dis-

tinctly as they passed, and they had no eyes except for the lighted tree in the castle hall, and none of them even noticed the lonely little girl.

But that was nothing new to Bluebell, because she had often watched the rich children in London driving past her in their carriages on their way to the pantomimes and Christmas parties, but none of them had ever stopped to look at the ragged little flower-girl on the pavement with her basket of violets. So she just sat still and watched, until the last of them had gone up the marble steps that led into the castle. Then two heralds came out and put up a big notice board with "House Full" written upon it, just as she had often seen them do outside the theatres in the Strand.

After that Bluebell got up and walked back again towards the forest, wondering more than ever how she was to set about finding the hiding-place of the Sleepy King. And as she went along, she heard a curious rustling noise amongst the branches of the big trees above her head. It grew louder and louder, till it sounded like the tinkling of a thousand little silver bells. Bluebell looked up into the trees to see where the sound came from, but there was nothing visible there. Then she heard a little peal of laughter, and, turning to see what it meant, she found herself face to face with a real live fairy.

She was the prettiest little creature you can imagine, with lovely golden hair like the finest spun silk, and a frock that sparkled and glittered in the sun. She carried a white wand in her hand, with a bright light twinkling on the top of it, and she looked exactly as if she had stepped out of a picture book. Bluebell was not in the least frightened of her; only she had never spoken to a fairy before, and she did not quite know how she ought to begin. But the fairy spoke first.

"Welcome to my kingdom, little

SHE HEARD A SOUND OF LAUGHTER AND CHATTERING VOICES COMING FROM THE FOREST.

Bluebell," she said. "I have been waiting for you for many years, and there is a great task in store for you. For you are the child, of all the children in the world, whom I have chosen to awaken the Sleeping King. I am the Fairy of the Forest who cast the spell upon him, and to-day I am to send you those who shall guide you to his hiding-place. Whatever you may see or hear, do not be frightened or led away from the path which you must follow; for I shall be close at hand to help you, though you will not be able to see me."

"I wish you would come with me yourself," Bluebell said. "I am afraid I *shall* be rather frightened, if I am to go with strangers I have never seen before."

But the fairy smiled and answered:

"A year ago, little Bluebell, I sent one of my messengers to you, although you never knew it. He came to you in the form of a starving cat, and you called him Peter. He crept in at your garret window when you were only a little half-starved flower-girl; because I wanted to try you and see how you would receive him. You greeted him as a friend, and to-day you will find him a true friend indeed. All the kindness that you have shown to him he will repay you a thousandfold."

And while the little girl was thinking how wonderful these things were, the fairy waved her wand and called "Peter," very softly.

Then, from behind one of the great forest trees, Peter the cat came bounding out. And he was so pleased to see his little mistress again, that he

THE FAIRY OF THE FOREST.

purred and arched his back, and rubbed his soft fur against Bluebell's hand, and rolled over and over in the warm woolly snow; which meant, in

cat language, that he was just as glad as she was to meet again. When they had greeted each other, the fairy spoke again.

"As soon as I have gone," she said, "you will follow the path that leads yonder, through the forest, to the Enchanted Glade, and Peter the cat will be your companion. Before you have journeyed far, you will meet two naughty schoolboys, the only children in all these dominions who are not present at the great king's Christmas tree. You will tell them that you have seen and spoken to the Fairy of the Forest, and that her orders are that they shall lead you straight to the Magic Oak."

"But if they are naughty schoolboys," answered Bluebell, "perhaps they won't do what they are told."

"They cannot help it," said the fairy; "however much they may wish to disobey my orders, they cannot fight against the spell which I have laid upon them. Follow them wherever they lead you until you reach the Magic Oak, and leave the rest with me. But I warn you not to turn aside, however great you may find the temptation. If you fancy yourself in danger, remember that I am near you, and that Peter the cat is your protector. And now, good-bye, little Bluebell; when we meet again, you shall earn your reward."

The fairy waved her wand again, and from all

the forest trees above their heads came the same sound of music which Bluebell had heard before. And, as it grew louder and louder, the fairy waved her wand once more, and she floated away up into the air, higher and higher and higher, until she became a tiny speck in the blue sky above, like a bright little twinkling star that you sometimes see at sunset on a winter evening.

But Bluebell did not feel at all lonely now, because she had her old friend Peter the cat by her side. She kissed him on his furry nose, to make sure that he was really there, and he said "Miau" two or three times to show that he understood what was expected of him.

And then the two set forth together to seek the Magic Oak, the secret hiding-place of the Sleeping King.

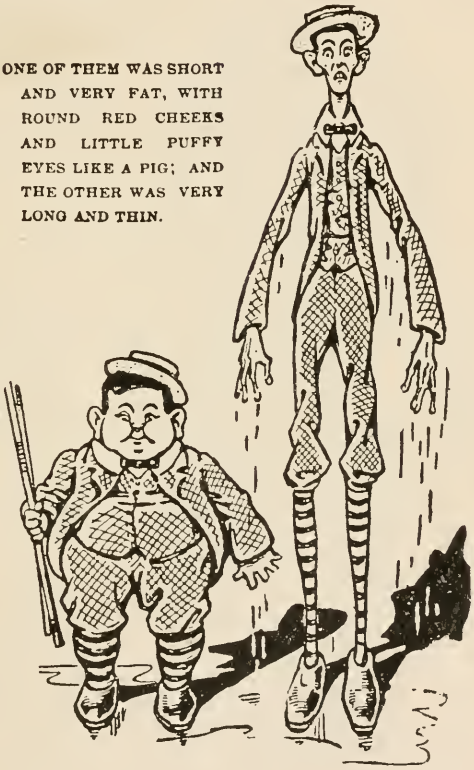
CHAPTER III.

THEY had not gone very far before Bluebell heard some one shouting in the distance; and as the sound approached, she could make out the voices of two boys singing the chorus of a song. They sang very loud and very badly, as though each one was trying to drown the other's voice, and the result was so unpleasant that even Peter the cat put up his back and hissed in his throat, to show that he objected.

But the noise came nearer and nearer, until at last the two boys themselves appeared round a turn in the forest path, and Bluebell thought they were the most curious pair she had ever seen.

One of them was short and very fat, with round red cheeks and little puffy eyes like a pig; and the other was very long and thin, with a white face and long hair, and big ears that stuck out on each side of his head. But they were both dressed exactly in the same way, which made them look all the more curious.

They wore tweed jackets and knickerbockers, and white Eton collars; but while the fat boy's head bulged out above his coat like an overgrown turnip, the thin boy's legs stuck out below his knickerbockers like two long thin sticks of black sealing-wax. The fat boy carried in his hand the joints of a fishing rod, and the thin boy's clothes were dripping with water from head to foot, but this did not seem to cause him the slightest inconvenience. Perhaps he was used to it. But the



ONE OF THEM WAS SHORT AND VERY FAT, WITH ROUND RED CHEEKS AND LITTLE PUFFY EYES LIKE A PIG; AND THE OTHER WAS VERY LONG AND THIN.

strangest thing of all was their extraordinary likeness to the fat coachman and the thin footman who belonged to the carriage in the Strand.

When they caught sight of Bluebell, the boys both stopped singing, and stared at her for a moment in silence. Then they burst out laughing, and stood pointing at her, one with a long, thin finger, the other with a fat and podgy hand.

"It's a girl!" said the fat boy.

"And a cat!" said the thin boy. "Let us snowball them."

They stooped down and gathered up some of the warm, woolly snow; and Bluebell would have been rather frightened, but just at that moment she heard the same whispering noise among the tree-tops, which she now knew to be fairy music. And the snowballs did not hurt in the least, for they never reached their mark at all; but dispersed into the air in little feathery clouds that floated away like soap bubbles.

As soon as the boys found that they were not doing any harm, they gave up their amusement, as mischievous boys generally do; and they came a little closer to examine Bluebell and Peter the cat. The fat boy spoke first, and Bluebell noticed that he always winked at his brother when he said anything that he thought was funny; and she re-

membered that she had seen grown-up people in London do the same thing.

"What is your name?" asked the fat boy abruptly.

"Bluebell," answered the flower-girl.

"Don't tell lies," said the thin boy. "Bluebell isn't a name; it's a flower."

"I'm called after a flower," she began timidly, but the fat boy interrupted her.

"She says she's a cauliflower!" he announced, with a wink at his brother, and the pair burst out laughing.

"I said nothing of the sort," Bluebell protested. "I told you I took my name from a flower."

"IT'S A GIRL," SAID THE FAT BOY. "AND A CAT," SAID THE THIN BOY.

"Then go and return it before you get into trouble," said the fat boy.

"People who take things that don't belong to them go to the police station, and come to a bad end."

The two schoolboys joined hands and danced round in a circle, singing:

"Him as takes what isn't his'n,
When he's cotched gets sent to prison."

It seemed to the little flower-girl that it was quite useless to argue with them, and she saw that her friend Peter was yawning as if he did not think them worth his notice. So she waited patiently until they grew tired of their occupation before she said with dignity:

"I think that you are very rude little boys."

"It doesn't much matter what you think," answered the thin boy. "You're only a girl."

And Bluebell reflected that if these two were average specimens, she was not at all sorry she wasn't a boy. But she did not say so, because she was a wise little person, and she wanted to change the conversation to something pleasanter. She decided that the fat boy's face looked more good-tempered than his brother's, so she addressed her next remark to him.

"You haven't told me your names yet," she said.

"Blob!" said the fat boy, and gave his companion a wink.

"Blib!" said the thin boy, and shut up his mouth with a snap.

They then both burst out laughing again, and Bluebell thought that she had never seen any one

AND SHE SAW THAT HER FRIEND PETER WAS YAWNING AS IF HE DID NOT THINK THEM WORTH HIS NOTICE.

so easily amused. But their answers were so silly that she was obliged to protest.

"Oh, come now," she said. "You're talking nonsense. Those aren't names at all."

"If they aren't names," answered the fat boy, "perhaps you will kindly tell us what they are."

"And if you can't tell us what they are," continued the thin boy, "perhaps you will be good enough to explain how you know that they aren't names."

"Well, I never heard of any one being called by them before," said Bluebell.

"Of course you haven't," retorted the thin boy. "If you had they would belong to somebody else; and if we had taken them, we should be thieves, like you!"

There did not seem to be any satisfactory answer to that, so Bluebell asked:

"Do you really mean that I am to call you Blib and Blob when I speak to you?"

"Nobody asked you to speak to us," said the fat boy.

"I can't help it," Bluebell suggested. "There's no one else to speak to."

"Then there's no reason for you to speak at all," said the thin boy.

At this point it seemed that the conversation was likely to come to an end; for the boys were evidently not inclined to be friendly, and the girl did not see much amusement in the rudeness of their remarks. She was wondering how on earth to introduce the subject of the Forest Fairy, when the boy who called himself Blob asked a question.

"What are you doing in the forest?" he said. "You're a stranger, and strangers have no business here without our permission."

Then Bluebell saw her opportunity, for she was quite sure that, when she told them her errand, the two naughty boys would be impressed with her importance.

"I have come here to find the secret hiding-place of the Sleeping King," she announced.

But her remarks seemed to amuse this extraordinary pair more than anything else that had been said, for they laughed as though it were the best joke they had ever heard.

"She's come to find the Sleeping King; ha, ha!" laughed Blob.

"The Sleeping King; ha, ha!" echoed Blib. And they went into such fits of laughter that they had to lie down and roll about in the snow before they could think of anything else to say.

At last the fat boy, who had laughed till his eyes were full of tears, found breath enough to speak.

"Do you know how long he's been asleep?" he asked.

"More than two hundred years," answered Bluebell promptly.

"And you suppose that you are going to find him, and wake him up?" went on the thin boy.

"I'm quite sure I am," she answered confidently.

"And what's more, you two boys have been sent here to show me the way."

"Who told you that?" asked Blob sharply.

"The Fairy of the Forest told me," Bluebell answered.

"How can we possibly show you the way," said Blib, "when we don't know it ourselves?"

"You know the way to the Magic Oak," replied Bluebell. "And that is where you have got to take me."

At the mention of the Magic Oak the boys stopped laughing, and their faces grew so serious that the flower-girl wondered what could be the matter. The thin boy spoke first, and his teeth chattered so much that Bluebell thought he must have caught cold from standing about in his wet clothes; but when she looked carefully, she noticed that they were quite dry again. But his eyes were very wide open, and he kept looking over his shoulder as if he were afraid.

"Who said we were to go to the Magic Oak?" he asked.

"The Fairy of the Forest said so," Blubell answered."

"Then we just won't," said the fat boy. "Will we, Blib?"

And Blib answered promptly, "Not much!"

Now Bluebell began to be rather sorry for these

two big boys when she saw how really frightened they were; and she wondered whether they were

AT THE SAME MOMENT HE RECEIVED A BOX ON THE EARS THAT MADE HIS HEAD SPIN AND BROUGHT TEARS INTO HIS EYES.

only cowards, or whether there was some real danger about the Magic Oak. Then she remem-

bered what her friend the fairy had told her, and she patted Peter the cat on the head just to restore her own courage, and made up her mind to set the boys a good example. So she said, quite boldly:

"You'll have to go, whether you like it or not, and the sooner we start the better. Because, you know, you daren't disobey the fairy's orders."

The thin boy looked all round him, to make quite sure that they were alone; then he pretended to be very brave indeed.

"I don't care *that* for the fairy's orders!" he announced. And when he said "*that*" he put out his tongue and snapped his fingers.

At the same moment he received a box on the ears that made his head spin and brought tears into his eyes. He stared about him in astonishment, to see who it was that had hit him, but there was no one except the other two children in sight.

The fat boy was roaring with laughter; so the thin one walked up to him with his face very red and his fists doubled; for naughty boys are very fond of laughing at other people, but they don't like to be laughed at themselves.

"What did you do that for?" said Blib.

"Do what?" said Blob.

"Box my ears," said Blib.

"I didn't," said Blob.

"Then who did?"

"I don't know. Perhaps she did." And Blob pointed at Bluebell and winked as usual.

"I never touched him," said the little girl indignantly. "But I expect it was a punishment for speaking rudely about the fairy."

"What did I say?" asked Blib.

And the fat boy repeated:

"I don't care *that* for the fairy's orders."

And he put out his tongue and snapped his fingers exactly as his brother had done. But the words were scarcely out of his mouth before he too received a sounding box on the ears which made him jump.

This time Blib roared with laughter, because he had set a trap for his brother, and he was delighted to see how easily Blob had fallen into it. But when the fat boy squared his fists and marched up to the thin boy, Bluebell thought it was time to interfere.

"Don't you think it would be wiser," she said, "if you were to show me the way, instead of quarreling with one another?"

And the two boys, who were by this time rather cowed, came to the conclusion that she was right. So, after a little discussion as to who should lead the way, it was decided that the three children

should walk side by side, with Bluebell in the middle; and that they should keep quite close together, whatever happened. And Peter the cat, with his tail straight up in the air, walked solemnly along behind them.

Before they had gone a hundred yards, the snow all round them began to melt and disappear, until at last there was not a sign of it left, and all the grass and the trees were as green as if it had been the middle of summer.

Bluebell considered that a very curious thing, and she asked the fat boy what he thought of it.

"It means," said Blob solemnly, "that somebody is going to make things very warm for us."

CHAPTER IV.

After that, the children walked a little way in silence, the two boys looking carefully about them to see whether there was any danger, and Bluebell wondering more than ever what extraordinary adventures were in store for her. The first novelty of the companionship soon wore off, and she was struck, more than ever, by the absurd likeness of the two boys to the coachman and footman whom she had seen on the old gentleman's carriage in the Strand. She wondered vaguely whether they could possibly be any relations. Being a little girl, she was naturally the first to speak.

"Why didn't you go to the Christmas tree at the castle?" she asked.

"Why didn't you?" said Blib.

"Well, you see, I wasn't invited," Bluebell answered. "They didn't even know I was here."

"We didn't go because we *were* invited," remarked Blob, as if that were quite conclusive.

"It doesn't seem a very good reason——" Blue-

bell was beginning, when the thin boy interrupted her.

"It is an excellent reason. They had no business to invite us. We ought to have invited them."

"But the castle belongs to the king," said Bluebell.

"It doesn't," answered Blib. "It belongs to us. He's a usurper!"

The little girl thought for a minute.

"I'm not quite sure that I know what a usurper is," she said.

"Look it out in the dictionary," replied Blib.

"But I haven't got a dictionary."

"Then don't look it out," retorted Blib.

"A usurper," remarked the fat boy slowly, "is a person who appropriates something that does not belong to him. You're one, because you took your name from a flower; he's one, because he took our throne from us. But he isn't a real king, he's only a regent."

"She doesn't know what a regent is," said Blib.

"Oh, yes, I do," Bluebell replied. "It's the name of a street in London."

"Don't try to be funny," snapped Blib.

"I'm not," she answered.

"I know you're not. I said, 'Don't *try* to be.'"

Bluebell was silent for a minute or two, while she thought over their remarks. Then she asked:

"If the castle belongs to you, why don't you go and claim it.?"

"Because we're twins," said Blob.

"Well, I don't see that that makes much difference," Bluebell answered.

"You would if you were a twin," said Blib. "We don't know which of us is the oldest; so we can't decide who ought to occupy the throne."

"Then why don't you both occupy it?" she asked, for she thought that would really be a very simple solution of the difficulty.

"Because," said the fat boy solemnly, "it's only a small throne. It wouldn't hold two. And I wish you wouldn't ask so many questions."

So Bluebell stopped talking, and began to look about her. Although they were walking quite slowly, the country seemed to slip along past them at an extraordinary pace, and she was quite sure that they must be miles and miles away from the castle already. The forest trees went racing by one after the other like the telegraph poles outside the windows of a railway carriage.

And suddenly in the distance she saw a great big sheet of water sparkling in the sun, and on the surface of it were great broad leaves of water-lilies. Something was moving about amongst them, though the children were still too far off to make out distinctly what it was. But the forest slipped away

so fast that they very soon reached the lake, and then Bluebell saw that it was alive with bullfrogs.

One of them, who wore a crown upon his funny little head, climbed solemnly up on a large water-lily leaf, and croaked very loudly.

"It's the King of the Bullfrogs opening Parliament," said Blob. "Come into the Strangers' Gallery and we'll listen to the debate."

They made their way on to a little hillock which looked down upon the lake, and in front of them was a small shrubbery where the branches were interlaced in a sort of lattice-work, so that they had to peep through the grating. But the King of the Bullfrogs saw them, for he stood up on his hind legs and took off his crown, very politely, to Bluebell. And the little girl made her best courtesy in return.

Then the debate began, and she thought it was a very stupid one. First one old bullfrog and then another stood up in his place on a water-lily leaf and croaked for a time by himself. Then the rest took up a sort of chorus, and Bluebell perceived that they were divided into two parties. The bullfrogs on the right-hand side of the pond applauded everything that one of their own number said; while the bullfrogs on the left objected and interrupted. And it seemed to the little girl that this was rather a silly way of discussing things. But

that was probably because she could not understand a single word they said.

"IT'S THE KING OF THE BULLFROGS OPENING PARLIAMENT," SAID BLOB.

"What are they talking about?" she asked Blib.
"About the crisis," answered the thin boy.
"What is a crisis?" asked Bluebell.

"A thing they have in the East, of course," said Blib. "How ignorant you are."

Then the fat boy chimed in. "They are discussing a frontier rising of the tadpoles," he announced. "The tadpoles have signed a treaty with the water-rats, and they are trying to annex the northeast corner of the pond, which belongs to the bullfrogs. The bullfrogs object, and so they're going to fit out an expedition to punish their enemies, and they want to increase their navy."

"They seem to have more than their fair share of the pond already," said Bluebell.

"Of course they have; that's why they want more," answered Blib.

And the little girl thought that was a very curious answer; but it reminded her of the things that Dicky the shoeblack used to read to her from the papers, which she had never been able to understand. So she waited for a little, to see what would be the result of all the croaking, and made up her mind not to ask any more questions.

But suddenly she noticed a tremendous commotion amongst a party of bullfrogs collected together on a water-lily leaf of their own, which looked like a small green island. They were all croaking at once, and they seemed to be very excited. She asked the fat boy who they were and what they wanted.

"They don't know what they want," said Blob. "But they're asking for a Parliament of their own, and they intend to call it Home Rule."

"Will they get it?" said Bluebell eagerly, for these noisy little people seemed rather more amusing than the rest.

"You wait and see," answered Blib.

And at the same moment the king gave an order; and suddenly the little green island disappeared under the water, and stayed there for several minutes. When it came up again, it was quite empty.

"What has become of them all?" Bluebell asked.

"What would become of you, if you were held under water for five minutes?" asked Blib.

Well, I should probably be drowned. But I think that's rather an unkind way to treat them," she answered.

"It's the only way to treat them," said the fat boy. But Bluebell was quite sorry for her little friends on the green island, and she asked no more questions until the King of the Bullfrogs suddenly stood up in his place and took off his crown to her again. Then he dived into the water, and all the rest followed his example.

"We can go now," said Blob. "The sitting's over."

"But what have they decided?" she asked, for she thought that surely, after all that croaking, this was rather a tame ending.

"They haven't decided anything," answered Blob. "They never do."

"Then what do they meet for?" she asked.

"To hear each other croak, of course," said Blib. "Come on, it's time for us to be off."

So the children got up and walked away, with Peter the cat behind them, and Bluebell said:

"I don't call that very amusing."

"It isn't meant to be amusing," remarked the fat boy. "It's politics!"

As they walked off into the forest again, a crowd of little brownies came racing past them with newspapers on their arms. They were extraordinary little people, not much bigger than mice, and they were all shouting at the top of their voices.

"Extra special. Rising of the tadpoles. Decision of the Government."

And Bluebell listened to them in astonishment, though the two boys took no notice whatever.

"But you told me they hadn't decided anything," she said to the fat boy.

"No more they have," he answered.

"Then why do the newspapers say they have?" she asked.

"Because they're newspapers! And you're the

most ignorant little girl I ever saw," retorted Blib.

"Well, I've never been in such an extraordinary place in my life," replied Bluebell.

"And that's not saying much," said Blob. "You'll see stranger things than that before you're much older."

And so she did; for suddenly there came marching along through the forest a procession of water-rats, hundreds and hundreds strong, strutting along on their hind legs. with a big

AS THEY WALKED OFF INTO THE FOREST AGAIN, A CROWD OF LITTLE BROWNIES CAME RACING PAST THEM WITH NEWSPAPERS ON THEIR ARMS.

brass band in front of them. Over their heads they waved banners, and when Bluebell stopped to see what was written on them, she read:

"*Down with the bullfrogs. Down with everybody.*"

Their leader was a sleek, well-fed rat, who rode upon a piebald guinea-pig, and when he caught sight of Bluebell he gave orders to some of his followers, who came and rattled money-boxes in front of the children.

"Don't you give them anything," said Blob. "They're humbugs."

"What are they trying to do?" asked Bluebell.

"They are a procession of the unemployed," explained Blib, "and they are pretending that they want work. But they don't really, they only want money."

When the rat on the guinea-pig's back heard that, he was very angry, and he came riding up to Bluebell quite fiercely.

"If you don't give me money, little girl, I'll bite you," he said.

But Bluebell remembered what the Fairy of the Forest had said to her, and she turned to Peter the cat.

"Send him away, Peter," she cried. And the words were scarcely out of her mouth, when the

cat sprang into the middle of the procession. Then there was such a squeaking and scurrying as never was seen before. Away went the leader on the guinea-pig, and away went all his followers, racing in every direction through the forest, and dropping their beautiful banners as they ran.

Peter the cat did not chase them very far, but when he came back to his mistress he was grinning from ear to ear as though he enjoyed the joke, and there was not a single rat in sight. Then Bluebell stooped and picked up one of the fallen banners, and to her surprise its shape and color changed directly she held it in her hand to something soft and round, with red and white specks on it.

"Why, it's a mushroom," said Bluebell.

"Rot," said Blib. "It's a silly old fungus, that's all. I say, it's going to rain."

And while he spoke the sky grew gradually blacker and blacker, until everything was quite dark; and the wind came whistling and shrieking through the tops of the bending trees. Straight away in front of them the children could see the rain streaming down as if some one had pulled the string of a shower-bath, but, curiously enough, the place where they were standing was quite dry.

Then out of the blackness of the forest came a

roar and rattle of thunder, and a bright flash of lightning. Bluebell was rather frightened.

"Don't you think we had better go in?" she asked, because she had often heard grown-up people say that it was not safe to be out in a thunder-storm under the trees.

"There's no inn to go to," said Blob.

"And it's all your own fault for bringing us here," added Blib. "The only thing we can do is to get on as fast as we can."

So the children hurried along into the darkness, and Bluebell noticed that though the sky grew blacker, and the wind howled more fiercely than ever, the rain kept a little way in front, and not a single drop fell upon them. But the storm grew worse and worse, the rain hissed through the leaves, the thunder roared, and the lightning flashed on every side.

And suddenly out of the darkness came a sound of bellowing and roaring, as if all the animals in the Zoological Gardens had got out at once, and were having a fight amongst themselves. Huge black bats and owls as big as umbrellas came flapping and hooting over their heads, and the children held each other's hands, and did not dare even to speak. And if they had, they could not have heard each other, for the noises were quite deafening.

"Huge Black Bats and Owls came flapping and hooting over their heads."

But all of a sudden there came a lull, and a thousand little bright lights gleamed out from a hollow behind them. And in less than a minute the hollow was filled with tiny sprites, who danced backwards and forwards among the trees; and it seemed to Bluebell as if a rainbow had suddenly come to life, and the pieces of it were running about and enjoying themselves.

They looked so bright and pretty that the little girl wanted to run down and join them, but the two boys held her back.

"Don't you have anything to do with them," said Blob. "They are the servants of the Yellow Dwarf, and they will lead you into danger. Those are the Will-o'-the-Wisps."

"But they are so pretty," said Bluebell. "I'm quite sure they wouldn't do me any harm. And I don't believe you can ever find your way through that dark forest in front of us."

"Where there's a will there's a way," said the fat boy solemnly. "You come along with us."

"Where there's a will there's a wisp," said the thin boy. "And where there's a wisp there's danger. You come along with us to the Magic Oak."

Directly he mentioned the Magic Oak, a strange thing happened. The Will-o'-the-Wisps suddenly disappeared, and there was a tremendous flash of

lightning straight in front of them. A huge forest tree burst open from top to bottom, and in the hollow of the trunk appeared the most hideous little man that ever was seen.

THE YELLOW DWARF.

A faint blue light hung all round him, like the color of a snap-dragon dish when you put salt in it, and he was as yellow as a guinea from top to toe. His head was about four sizes too large for him; and he only had one eye, which glared from the middle of his forehead like an angry policeman's

bull's-eye lantern. His hands and feet looked as if they had been made for a giant, and fastened by mistake to his hunchbacked little body; and his mouth stretched right across his face, like an india-rubber tobacco pouch. He glared angrily at the children for a minute; then the tree shut up with a bang, and everything was dark again.

"What an ugly little monster," said Bluebell, as soon as she could speak.

"Take care what you say about him," said Blib. "He'll never forgive you."

"I'm not afraid of him," said Bluebell boldly. "And I don't suppose I shall ever see him again."

"Oh, won't you!" laughed Blib. "You don't know who he is."

"And I don't care," said Bluebell.

"Then I'll tell you," remarked Blob. "That is the Yellow Dwarf who lives in the Magic Oak, and we're on our way to call upon him!"

CHAPTER V.

Now, it is all very well to say that you are not in the least afraid of a thing you have never seen, and to laugh at other people who are afraid; but when you are suddenly brought face to face with a little deformity as hideous as the Yellow Dwarf was, it is quite a different matter.

When Bluebell heard that she was on her way to visit the little monster who guarded the Magic Oak, and realized what he looked like, she had a good mind to give up the expedition altogether and turn back. But turning back was not so easy as it sounds. In the first place, she knew that she would probably lose her way in the storm and the darkness of the forest; and in the second, she remembered that she would be disobeying the fairy's orders. She felt half inclined to sit down and cry, only she was ashamed of showing the two boys that she was frightened, so she put on as bold a face as she could, and pushed steadily forward.

Meanwhile, it seemed rather a curious thing that they were going in the opposite direction from the place where the Yellow Dwarf had appeared, since the boys said that they were on their way to call upon him. But so many curious things kept on happening that she had scarcely time to think about it.

The storm was still raging on every side of them, and the rain falling faster than ever, and the path along which the children were making their way grew steeper and more stony at every step. And it was so overgrown with brushwood and brambles that the little girl found her ragged frock torn and frayed at every step, while the thorns pricked and scratched her poor little bare feet and hands. There was not even room for them all three to walk side by side; so Bluebell hurried on in front, with the boys following her in silence; and Peter the cat, with his tail drooping dejectedly, trotted along behind, evidently rather disgusted with the whole thing.

But suddenly, just as it seemed to Bluebell that it was impossible to go any further, she found herself on the brow of the hill, and saw the gleam of sunlight through the thick branches. She forced her way eagerly through the brushwood which held her back, and emerged into an open space. And the sight she saw was so wonderful that it almost took her breath away.

"Oh, boys," she cried. "Isn't it lovely?"

The thin boy looked carefully all round him before he answered.

"It might be worse," he announced.

AND PETER THE CAT, WITH HIS TAIL DROOPING DEJECTEDLY, TROTTED ALONG BEHIND, EVIDENTLY RATHER DISGUSTED WITH THE WHOLE THING.

"On the other hand," said the fat boy solemnly, "it might be better. And if the Yellow Dwarf did not live in it, it would."

"Never mind about the Yellow Dwarf," said Bluebell breathlessly. "Tell me where we are."

"In the Enchanted Glade," said Blib.

"I think it's the most beautiful place in the whole world," the little girl answered.

"That," remarked Blob, "is an exaggeration. You haven't seen the whole world, and what's more you're never likely to."

AND AMONG THEIR BRANCHES BIRDS OF THE MOST WONDERFUL PLUMAGE WERE SINGING ALL THE SONGS SHE HAD EVER HEARD.

But Bluebell took no notice of him, for she was far too much taken up with the wonderful scene in front of her. It was a lovely place, just like a picture out of a pantomime, and the contrast to the black stormy forest behind them made it seem even more gorgeous than it really was.

The trees, instead of being all one monotonous green, were colored gold, and brown, and pink; and, among their branches, birds of the most wonderful plumage were singing all the songs she had ever heard, like the piping bullfinches Dicky had once shown her in a shop near the Seven Dials. Peacocks strutted about in the

sunlight; and golden pheasants, far more splendid than the one in the Zoological Gardens, paraded about without taking the slightest notice of the

THERE WERE SALMON, AND WHITEBAIT, AND LITTLE PINK PRAWNS, AND MACKEREL, AND TURBOT, AND FAT RED LOBSTERS.

children. Then there were white rabbits chasing one another under the trees, and a wonderful little waterfall chattering and bubbling over a rocky cascade into a beautiful clear stream below.

And the stream itself was the most wonderful thing of all, for it was crowded full of all the fish that generally live on marble slabs, with blocks of ice, in the Bond Street shop windows. There were salmon, and whitebait, and little pink prawns, and mackerel, and turbot, and fat red lobsters that made Bluebell wish that Dicky the shoeblack was with her. For Dicky had once told her that lobsters only lived in the sea, and that they did not turn red until they had been boiled; and now that she knew he must have been mistaken, she was very anxious to tell him so.

Right in the middle of the Enchanted Glade there grew a huge tree, much bigger than all the others, with long branching roots stretching away in every direction, and covered with the softest green moss. The children made their way to it and sat down in the shade, while Peter the cat stroked his whiskers and purred contentedly.

And the ground was not in the least like ordinary ground, which is generally all one color; but it was worked out in patterns like a beautiful carpet, with flowers of every shade and color making figures on a green background of grass. And in Fairyland you can get spring flowers to grow at the same time as autumn tints upon the trees, which is a great advantage in landscape gardening.

After all the noise and blackness of the forest,

it seemed so pretty and peaceful that it was some minutes before Bluebell remembered the object which had brought them there. When it occurred to her she said:

TO THE LITTLE GIRL'S SURPRISE IT KEPT GETTING LARGER AND LARGER UNTIL IT WAS SO BIG THAT TWENTY PEOPLE COULD EASILY HAVE SAT ROUND IT.

"I wonder where the Magic Oak is. Do you think we are near it?"

"We'll go and look for it after dinner," answered Blib, as though it were the most natural thing in

the world to suppose that they had only come there for a picnic.

"I don't see what we are going to eat," said Bluebell. "We haven't brought any provisions with us."

"Little girls should be seen and not heard," remarked the fat boy. "You can help to lay the cloth."

And he produced from his pocket a nice clean white handkerchief, carefully folded up. One corner of it he gave to Bluebell, and the other he held himself. To the little girl's surprise it kept getting larger and larger until it was so big that twenty people could easily have sat round it, and she ventured to suggest that they had better not undo any more of it.

"Why?" asked Blib.

"Because it is quite large enough already," she answered. "And besides, he'll never be able to put a tablecloth of that size into his pocket again when we've finished with it."

"Pockets," remarked the fat boy solemnly, "were never intended to hold tablecloths."

"As far as that goes," said Bluebell, "handkerchiefs were never intended to eat off."

She thought that was rather a good answer, for she was a logical little person; but Blob only winked slowly at his brother.

"May I ask," he said, "who is going to eat off a handkerchief?"

"Well, it looks as if we were," replied Bluebell.

"You can't always go by looks," said Blib.

"Appearances are generally deceptive," added

THEN BLIB PICKED THREE LARGE CROCUSES FROM THE PATTERN OF THE CARPET.

Blob. And he stooped and picked three large dock leaves which were growing close to where they sat.

"What do you think those are?" he inquired.

"They are leaves," answered Bluebell.

"They aren't," said Blob. "They're plates." As he spoke he laid them down upon the cloth, and sure enough they changed into three white china plates.

Then Blib picked three large crocuses from the pattern of the carpet.

"You think those are flowers," he said. "But you're wrong, they're glasses."

He placed them on the cloth beside the plates, and Bluebell saw that he was right.

Next, the two boys proceeded to gather a lot of little dry twigs, and directly they put them on the tablecloth the twigs changed to knives and forks and spoons.

"Now," remarked the thin boy, "the table's laid, and it's your turn. Where's our dinner?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Bluebell. "I never saw a table laid like that before. Can't you get the dinner the same way as you got the plates and things?"

"We could," responded Blib, "but we've done our share already."

"Men," announced Blob, "provide the furniture. Women have to do the housekeeping."

By this time Bluebell was getting accustomed to their extraordinary remarks, and she was ready with her answer.

"I'm not a woman," she replied. "I'm only a little girl."

"In that case," said the fat boy, "you had better make haste and grow up, or you will probably starve."

"I know how we might get our dinner," said Bluebell, who was rather pleased with the idea of a picnic. "The water is full of fish, and you have got a rod with you. You might go and catch some."

"Pigs might fly," remarked the thin boy.

"But they don't," added his brother.

And they both sat still and looked at Bluebell as though they had not the slightest intention of acting on her advice.

"All right," she said. "Then we'll go without dinner. I'm not very hungry, so I don't much care."

She was really rather disappointed, but she thought it was wiser not to say so. And it was quite the best thing she could have done, for no sooner did those curious twins find that she was not particularly anxious, than they immediately changed their minds. They got up and busied themselves with the joints of their fishing rod, and as soon as they had put it together they prepared to start off.

"Where are you going?" said Bluebell.

"To catch fish for dinner," answered Blib.

"I thought you said you weren't," Bluebell remarked.

"I didn't!" retorted Blib. "I said that pigs might fly."

"Well, that means the same thing," said Bluebell.

"It doesn't," answered Blib. "To say that pigs might fly cannot possibly mean that we don't intend to catch fish."

"Any more than to talk about flying fish would mean that we were going pig sticking," added his brother.

"I don't see any use in arguing," said the little girl, who was growing rather tired of them.

"Then don't argue!" answered the boys together.

"All right, I won't," she replied gently. "I'll sit here and wait until you come back. But don't stay away too long, or we shall never get to the Magic Oak at all."

"You'll probably get there quite soon enough," answered Blib.

"Perhaps sooner than you expect," put in Blob. "By the way, we'll take Peter the cat with us, if you don't want him."

"Why?" asked Bluebell.

"In case we get lost in the glade. Cats can al-

"And they both sat still and looked at Bluebell."

ways find their way back to the place they started from. Boys can't."

"He could if we were in London," answered Bluebell eagerly, for she had a great opinion of Peter, who was really a very clever cat. "But it's different here, you see, because I'm not at home."

"Then make yourself at home," said the fat boy, winking at his brother. "And don't talk so much."

Peter the cat, who had been asleep in the sun, woke up and looked at his mistress to see if she approved. Probably he had heard something about fish, which all good cats have a weakness for. And when Bluebell patted his head and told him he might go, he really seemed quite pleased, and walked off with the twins as though he quite realized the responsibility of his position. For cats understand a great deal more than people give them credit for, and the air of Fairyland has a wonderful effect in sharpening their wits.

As soon as they were out of sight, Bluebell sat down again on the thick moss by the trunk of the great tree and looked about her. She was not at all sorry to get rid of the schoolboys for a short time, because their silly remarks and arguments were beginning to get a little monotonous. And besides, she wanted to think over all the wonderful things that had happened to her since she started off on her journey to the kingdom of the Sleepy King.

She was not at all afraid to be left alone now, because the Enchanted Glade was so bright and sunny, and she knew that Peter the cat would not stay away too long.

And while she sat there alone, some very curious things happened to her. But they were so different from the things that happen to ordinary little girls in every-day life, that they must have a new chapter all to themselves.

CHAPTER VI.

"WHO are you?" said a voice.

Bluebell started and looked all round to see where the sound came from, but to her surprise there was nobody in sight. So she came to the conclusion that she must have been mistaken, and as there was no one to speak to, she did not feel called upon to answer.

"Who are you?" said the voice again.

"I can't see you——" Bluebell began.

"You can hear me," answered the voice. "That ought to be quite enough."

This time the little girl discovered that the sound came from the tree above her head, and on looking up amongst its branches she saw a very large white bird sitting there and looking down at her. It was a curious bird with an exceedingly solemn expression and very big eyes, which it opened and shut one at a time, and it kept on yawning as though it were very sleepy.

"Please," asked Bluebell, "are you a parrot?"

"No," answered the bird. "Are you?"

"Certainly not. I'm a little girl. But I thought a parrot was the only bird that talked."

ON LOOKING UP AMONGST ITS BRANCHES SHE SAW A VERY LARGE WHITE BIRD SITTING THERE AND LOOKING DOWN AT HER

"Nonsense," said the bird sleepily. "You are talking yourself."

"But I'm not a bird," answered Bluebell.

"You are. You're a little goose."

"I don't think that's very funny," replied Bluebell; "and besides, I've heard it before."

"You'll probably hear it again," was the solemn answer, "unless you grow wiser. I'm an owl."

It put its head on one side and puffed itself out into a great white ball. Then it yawned again and snapped its beak.

"What do you think of me?" it asked.

Bluebell thought it would be as well to conciliate it, so she tried to make a civil remark.

"I think your white feathers are lovely," she answered.

"Bosh!" remarked the owl.

"I beg your pardon," answered the little girl politely. "What did you say?"

"Bosh!" repeated the owl. "What are you doing here?"

"I want to find the Magic Oak," she said.

"No, you don't," answered the owl. "That's just where you're mistaken."

"Oh, but indeed I do," said the little girl earnestly. "I've come a very long way to look for it. Perhaps you can tell me where it is?"

"Perhaps I can," answered the owl. "But I won't."

"Then I think it's rather unkind of you," Bluebell said indignantly.

"You can think whatever you like," retorted the owl. "It doesn't make the slightest difference to me."

It puffed its feathers out again, blinked solemnly.

and shut its eyes as though it intended to go to

BLUEBELL AND THE OWL.

sleep. But Bluebell thought it would be a great

pity to lose any opportunity of learning anything about the Magic Oak, and the hiding-place of the Sleepy King whom she had come so far to find, so she determined to try again.

"Please, Mr. Owl——" she began.

"Shut up," replied the bird with a yawn. "Don't you see that I want to go to sleep?"

"If you will answer one question," said the little girl, "I won't disturb you any more; though I think you might spend your time better than sleeping in broad daylight."

"What's your question?" asked the owl.

"Do you know the Yellow Dwarf? said Bluebell.

"Of course I do," snapped the owl. "I'm his private secretary."

"You don't seem to do much work," replied Bluebell.

"I don't get much pay," retorted the owl.

"Then I shouldn't stay with him," remarked the little girl.

"Nobody asked you to," said the owl. "Mind your own business, and I'll attend to mine."

"That is exactly what I want to do," she said. "My business is to find the Magic Oak and to wake up the Sleepy King."

"It isn't," said the owl. "He doesn't want to wake, he wants to sleep. So do I; so do you. We all want to sleep. Good-night!"

But Bluebell had no intention of being put off so easily. She remembered that the schoolboys had told her the Yellow Dwarf was in charge of the Magic Oak, and if this foolish bird was really his private secretary, she argued that it must be in a position to give her some valuable information. So she called out boldly:

"I don't intend to let you go to sleep until you give me an answer. Where is the Magic Oak?"

The owl opened one eye very slowly, then the other, yawned solemnly and cleared his throat.

"*This* is the Magic Oak," he said deliberately.

Bluebell sprang to her feet in surprise.

"Do you mean to say you are sitting on it?" she asked.

"Yes," replied the bird sleepily. "But it isn't an egg."

"I never said it was," answered Bluebell eagerly.

"You implied it," retorted the owl. "I'm a bird, and birds sit on eggs."

"But if this is the Magic Oak," continued Bluebell, ignoring his last remark, "the hiding-place of the Sleepy King is underneath it."

"Just so," answered the owl. "The Magic Oak is divided, as you will observe, into several stories. They are all let out at present in furnished flats. The Sleeping King occupies the basement; the Yellow Dwarf lives on the first floor; I have

apartments on the second; and a nightingale is the tenant of the topmost branches. That is why he is called the Attic Bird."

Bluebell did not understand what he meant, but she waited to see if he had anything more to say.

"There are some more stories," he added with a tremendous yawn. "But I am much too sleepy to tell them."

"How am I to get down to the basement?" asked the little girl.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the owl. "You'll probably have to burrow, like the rabbits. Go and ask them. Don't worry me."

And he proceeded to curl himself up into a ball, put his head under his wing, and in another minute he was snoring loudly. Bluebell made one or two ineffectual efforts to attract his attention, but she soon found that it was no use, and gave it up in despair. However, she was very well pleased with the information he had given her, for she thought it would be a great piece of news to be able to tell the boys that she had found the Magic Oak all by herself. She walked carefully round the tree and examined it on every side, but she could find no trace of an opening or doorway of any kind in its trunk.

She wondered whether Peter the cat would be

able to go down a rabbit hole and investigate for her; when she suddenly remembered what the owl had said, and she determined to apply to the rabbits themselves. For she reflected that if a bird was able to speak, it was more than probable that the rabbits could do the same; and she noticed that they kept popping in and out of their burrows all round the place where she stood, and they probably knew of some secret staircase which would lead to the spot she was so anxious to discover.

So she selected a placid old gray-haired lady rabbit, who was seated under the shadow of a dock-leaf, and addressed her very politely.

"Could you kindly tell me," she asked, "the way to the hiding-place of the Sleepy King?"

"My dear," answered the rabbit, "I shall be very pleased to be of any use to you, though, in a general way, I don't care about little girls. And if you ask me the reason of that, I should be obliged to unfold a tale which is a very long one. In referring to my tale, I allude to my story, not to the little white appendage with which nature has provided me; though, in a general way, I prefer short tails to long ones, and I am sure you will be pleased to learn that they are to be very generally worn this season."

"I am very glad to hear that," said Bluebell civilly. "But I am anxious to find the way——"

"I was just coming to that, my dear," broke in the rabbit leisurely, "when you interrupted me. And though, in a general way, I prefer to talk rather than to listen, there are occasions when interruptions are not so rude as they seem. And if you ask me the reason of that, I should say that if no one ever interrupted any one else, some people would go on talking all day long. And just think, my dear, what a terrible thing that would be.

The rabbit shook her gray head dolefully, and looked as if she were going to cry, and Bluebell felt quite sorry for her.

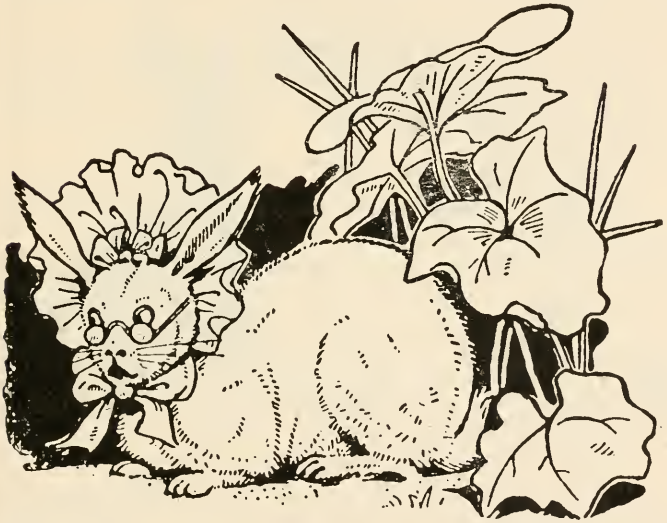
"I hope I haven't said anything to make you unhappy," she began.

"It isn't so much what you have said, my dear, as what you have left unsaid," the rabbit answered. "And though, in a general way, the things that people leave unsaid are wiser than the things they say, you will agree with me that there are some people who find the greatest difficulty in making their meaning clear to other people. And if you ask me the reason of that, I should say that it is probably accounted for by the fact that they don't know themselves. I hope you follow me, my dear."

"That is just what I want to do," said Bluebell, who was getting quite bewildered. "If you could show me——"

"My dear," interrupted the rabbit, "there are a

great many things that I could easily show you, because I am very much older than you are ; although, perhaps, you would not think so to look at me. And though, in a general way, young people nowadays



SO SHE SELECTED A PLACID OLD GRAY-HAIRED LADY RABBIT, WHO WAS SEATED UNDER THE SHADOW OF A DOCK-LEAF, AND ADDRESSED HER VERY POLITELY.

know very much more about everything than their elders do, owing to Board schools and such like, you will admit that the longer we live the more we learn. And if you ask me the reason of that——"

"But I didn't ask you the reason of anything," Bluebell broke in hurriedly. "And though, in a general way—oh, I beg your pardon," she added hastily, when she noticed that she had slipped into the rabbit's way of expressing herself, "I really did not mean to be rude."

But the gray rabbit sat up on her hind legs and glared at the little girl furiously.

"Rude," she ejaculated. "Oh, you ungrateful little weasel!"

"Oh, please forgive me," said Bluebell.

"Stoat!" answered the angry rabbit, as she hobbled off in the direction of her burrow.

"But I didn't mean it, really I didn't," Bluebell said eagerly. "If you will only listen a minute ——" But it was too late; for the gray rabbit, with a whisk of her little white tail, was vanishing underground. An instant later her head popped out from the entrance of the burrow.

"Ferret!" she hissed and disappeared.

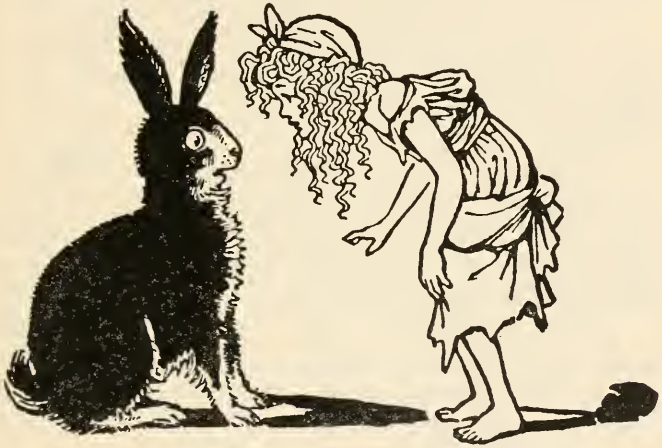
"Poor old thing, I'm afraid I've hurt her feelings," said Bluebell when she found herself alone. "But it was her own fault for talking such nonsense. I shall have to try one of the others."

This time she selected a black rabbit, who was sitting close to her, and stroking his whiskers carefully with his front paws.

"I have just been asking a friend of yours if she

could show me the way to the hiding-place of the Sleepy King," said the little girl politely.

"So I heard," answered the black rabbit unconcernedly.



THE BLACK RABBIT.

"But I couldn't understand what she was talking about," continued Bluebell.

"Of course you couldn't," rejoined the black rabbit casually. "She's mad."

"Mad!" repeated Bluebell. "Then she oughtn't to be allowed to go out by herself. She ought to be shut up."

"She has just been shut up," said the black rabbit. "You shut her up."

"But I did not mean to," said Bluebell apologetically. "I didn't know that she was mad."

"Then you ought to have known," answered the black rabbit calmly. "She's a Welsh rabbit, and she's mad on the subject of toasted cheese. For the matter of that we're all mad. Don't you know where you are?"

"In the Enchanted Glade," answered Bluebell.

"Nonsense," retorted the black rabbit. "You're in Coney Hatch, the asylum for mad rabbits. And if you want to make yourself agreeable to them, you'd better sing them a song."

"But why should I sing to them if they're all mad?" asked the little girl.

"If they weren't mad," responded the rabbit placidly, "they wouldn't listen to you. Take your guitar and sing."

And to Bluebell's surprise he pointed to one of the branches of the Magic Oak, where there hung a beautiful little guitar with a blue ribbon fastened to it, and her own name written on it in letters of gold. She took it down and ran her fingers across the strings, and although she had never touched such an instrument before, she found that it played quite easily.

And no sooner did they hear the sound, than

every rabbit in the place came swarming round her. From every nook and corner they hurried, black rabbits, white rabbits and gray ones; young, old, and middle-aged; forming themselves into a circle and sitting down, eager to listen.

"Begin," said the black rabbit calmly.

"But what am I to sing?" she asked.

"The song of the rabbit who lost his tail," was the answer. "Strike up, and we'll all join in the chorus."

And the next moment, to Bluebell's astonishment, she found herself singing a song she had never heard in her life before, though all the rabbits seemed to be quite familiar with it. And it went like this:

THE RABBIT'S TAIL!

There was once a little Bunny
And he lived in Rabbit Land;
Where his home was quaint and funny,
For the walls were built of sand.
He had sisters and he'd brothers,
Who were all as good as gold,
But he laughed at all the others
When they did what they were told.

"Chorus, please," shouted the black rabbit, and the others immediately chimed in:

When they did what they were told;
They were all as good as gold;
But he laughed at all the others
When they did what they were told.

And Bluebell proceeded:

After breakfast every morning
They would send him off to school,
But, in spite of every warning,
He played truant as a rule.
For his work he'd no ambition,
So it shortly came to pass
That he took up his position
At the bottom of his class!

And again the rabbits took up the chorus at the top of their little voices:

At the bottom of his class!
For it shortly came to pass
That he took up his position
At the bottom of his class!

Then Bluebell went on to the third verse, without knowing in the least how the words would come, until she reached them.

Now, one day while he was larking
In the woods, to his delight,
Came a sudden sound of barking,
And his heart stood still with fright.
For he recognized the stranger
As a spaniel, on the roam,
And he realized his danger,
So he scuttled off for home.

"All together, if you please," said the black rabbit, beating time with his paw. And the rabbit chorus sang:

"There was once a little Bunny, and he lived in Rabbit Land."

So he scuttled off for home;
For a spaniel, on the roam,
Is a source of deadly danger;
So he scuttled off for home.

And the little girl took up the song again, feeling quite interested in the naughty rabbit's fate.

But the spaniel ran the faster,
As the Bunny might have guessed;
And he met with a disaster,
Though he did his little best.
For his breath was coming thickly
And his limbs began to fail,
When the spaniel gained so quickly
That it grabbed him by the tail!

"Softly with the chorus," said the black rabbit, and they sang it pianissimo.

Oh, it grabbed him by the tail,
When his limbs began to fail,
For the spaniel gained so quickly
That it grabbed him by the tail!

Bluebell struck a chord on the guitar, and sang the last verse.

Then take warning, little rabbits,
For the Bunny's tale is true;
Be obedient in your habits,
Lest his fate occur to you.
Don't neglect your education,
Or you'll very quickly find,
When you reach your habitation,
That you've left your tail behind!

This time the rabbits hopped slowly away in time to the chorus, each in the direction of his home, singing as they went:

That you've left your tail behind!
For you'll very quickly find,
When you reach your habitation—

At this point each member of the chorus had arrived at his own home, and popped down underground. But a second later a head appeared at the opening of every burrow, and they all shouted in unison:

That you've left your tail behind!

And on the last word they vanished.

CHAPTER VII.

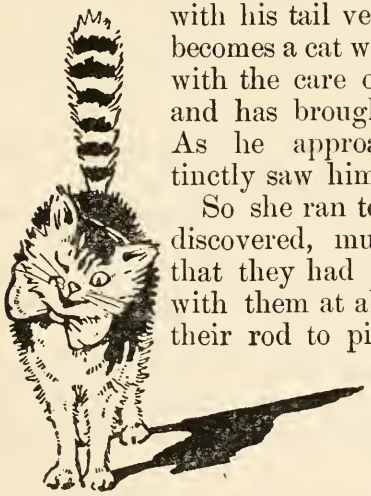
Bluebell looked round in astonishment, and found that she was quite alone. The rabbits had all disappeared as suddenly as they came, and in the branches of the Magic Oak the white owl was curled up in a round fluffy ball, fast asleep.

The little girl reflected that she was no nearer than before to finding an entrance to the hiding-place of the Sleeping King. She began to grow a little impatient, and she found herself wishing, for the twentieth time, that Dicky the shoeblack was with her. She was so accustomed to consult with him about anything that interested her, that she missed him to-day more than ever.

Then she remembered what a lot of wonderful things she would have to tell him when they did meet; things much more wonderful than the extraordinary ones he was always reading out of the newspapers, and much more interesting too, because hers were all real, and she was often very

doubtful about the newspaper stories, even when she could understand them.

Suddenly she heard a sound of voices, and she soon discovered that it was the twins returning. Peter the cat stalked solemnly in front of them, with his tail very high in the air, as becomes a cat who has been entrusted with the care of two human beings, and has brought them safely back. As he approached, Bluebell distinctly saw him wink at her.



PETER THE CAT STALKED SOLEMNLY IN FRONT OF THEM, WITH HIS TAIL VERY HIGH IN THE AIR.

So she ran to meet the boys, and discovered, much to her surprise, that they had not brought any fish with them at all. They had taken their rod to pieces again, and were sauntering along as if they were quite pleased with themselves, the fat boy puffing and blowing a good deal with the unusual exertion.

"Where are the fish?" asked Bluebell as soon as they were near enough to hear.

"In the water," replied the thin boy. "Where did you suppose they would be?"

"There is a place for everything," panted the fat boy, "and water is the proper place for fish. In fact, a fish out of water is a very lamentable spectacle."

"But haven't you caught any?" asked Bluebell.

"Of course we have," answered Blib. "Lots."

"Then why didn't you bring them with you?" she asked.

"Because," announced Blob solemnly, "they were so heavy we couldn't carry them."

"Oh, but you might have brought *one*," said Bluebell.

"No, we mightn't," replied the thin boy. "There was not a single one we could lift between us."

"A wise fisherman," added the fat boy, "never brings home what he catches. It is the only way to make people believe how heavy the fish really were."

"But if you don't bring them home," Bluebell suggested, "there doesn't seem to be much use in catching them."

"There isn't any," answered Blob. "And that's exactly the reason why we put them back in the water."

"I'm afraid," said Bluebell severely, "that you are not speaking the truth."

"Oh, yes, we are," answered Blob. "On our word of honor as fishermen!"

He winked at his brother, and the two burst out laughing, though the little girl could not see anything particularly funny in the answer.

Then it suddenly occurred to her that she had not told them her news, and she clapped her hands as she thought of it.

"You'll never guess," she said, "what I've found while you were away."

"There's no need to guess," said Blib, "because we know already."

"You've found the Magic Oak," continued Blob. "And there's nothing to be proud of in that, considering that we led you to it."

Bluebell was quite taken by surprise. "Do you mean to say that you knew it was here all the time?" she asked.

"Of course we did," answered Blib. "That's why we brought you to it."

"But why didn't you tell me so?"

"Because," said the fat boy sturdily, "you would have known as much as we did, and it isn't good for little girls to know too much."

Bluebell was too wise to let them know that she was disappointed, so she only said, "Well, the next thing we have got to do is to find the entrance to the Sleepy King's hiding-place."

"No, it isn't," answered the thin boy. "The next thing we have got to do is to sit down and watch the Jubilee Procession."

"The Jubilee Procession!" echoed Bluebell in astonishment. "Why, whose Jubilee is it?"

"It is the Jubilee of the Enchanted Glade," replied the fat boy. Don't you know that it is just fifty years since it rained?"

"I didn't know," began Bluebell.

"Then you know now," snapped Blib. "Don't talk so much."

And at this moment the sleepy voice of the White Owl came from the branches of the Magic Oak.

"Ladies and gentlemen," it said, "take your seats for the Jubilee Procession. It is just going to commence. No waiting! Cats half price!"

They looked up into the tree, and saw the silly bird just settling down to go to sleep again. So they found a nice mossy bank under the shelter of the trees, where their empty tablecloth was still spread out. Bluebell sat in the middle, with a twin on each side of her; and Peter the cat curled himself up comfortably on his mistress's knee. They had scarcely taken their places, when the procession began; and it was a very curious one indeed.

First, there came a curious little man, running

as fast as his legs would carry him. He was dressed in a red coat and velvet cap, and he wore white breeches and top-boots, with spurs on them. He was covered from head to foot with dirt and mud, and he looked very frightened indeed. In his hand was a large bottle with "*Rimmel*" written on it, and he sprinkled its contents on the ground as he ran.

He was scarcely out of sight, when there were loud shouts of "Tally-ho! Gone away!" and a troop of foxes came racing breathlessly after him.

One of them had a horn, which it tootled as it ran, and all the rest were armed with hunting whips. And the funny thing was, that the foxes were about ten times as large as the man.

Bluebell mentioned this to the twins, and Blib promptly answered:

"Of course they are. You don't suppose that they would hunt an animal their own size."

Then he got up and shouted "Tally-ho!" at the top of his voice, and Blob jumped up and shouted too, and between them they made such a noise that Bluebell thought they were going to be ill.

"Do you think that they will catch him?" she asked, as the foxes galloped out of sight.

"They would," answered the fat boy, "if the scent were a little better. But he's only using

cheap stuff. You can buy it anywhere for half-a-crown."

"Oh, look," said Bluebell eagerly, "here's another little man coming."

This time it was a tiny little person in knickerbockers and a shooting coat. He carried an empty game bag in his hand, and he was running as if his life depended upon it.

No sooner had he passed than a crowd of enormous pheasants, partridges and rabbits came hurrying after him. Each of them carried a popgun, and the noise they made was deafening.

"What will they do to him if they catch him?" asked Bluebell.

"If you're very anxious to know," replied the thin boy, "you can run after them and see."

"I think I'd rather stay where I am," she said.

"Then keep your eyes open and your mouth shut," answered the fat boy.

Bluebell made no answer, but she wished more than ever that her friend Dicky the shoeblack was with her. For Dicky did not allow little boys to say rude things, when he was within hearing. But to-day, when she wanted him most, he was not there.

When the pheasants and the partridges had all gone, there was a pause. Then, suddenly, a tiny little greyhound came galloping past as fast as he

could run, looking back nervously over his shoulder as he went. After him came a pack of hares as big as donkeys, hustling each other in their eagerness to get to the front. And Bluebell remembered an account of the Waterloo Cup that Dicky had once read to her. Only, in this curious glade, everything seemed to be upside down; for the greyhounds, she reflected, ought to have been chasing the hare. She was just about to make a remark to Blob, when another curious group came into sight.

This time it was two great big brown bears, and between them they led a man with a muzzle on his face, and a ring through his nose. They stopped in front of the Magic Oak, and put him through his performances. First he had to dance on his hands and knees; then he had to go through his drill with a heavy oak staff. When he had finished, the bears patted him on the head, and led him away. And Bluebell was rather glad to see the last of them, because they looked nasty bad-tempered beasts, and she was a little frightened of them.

After the bears there came a huge monkey with a barrel-organ. At the end of a string he led a little Italian boy, who jabbered and tried to talk, and to climb up every tree he got near enough to. But the big monkey jerked him back and made

him sit upon the organ; then he played a tune, and grinned and showed his teeth. He was just going to begin another when the voice of the white owl came from the top of the tree.

"Move on, if you please," it said. "We've got a King asleep in the basement, and he must not be disturbed."

The monkey mumbled something they could not hear, shouldered his barrel-organ, and marched away.

As soon as he had gone, there came a troop of ragged little urchins, closely followed by an enormous crowd of bullfrogs, who were busily engaged in throwing stones at them, and who seemed very angry indeed.

"Break their necks!" screamed the bullfrogs. "Break their necks!"

And away went the little urchins at the top of their speed, with a fusillade of stones behind them.

No sooner had they passed out of sight than another little ragged boy, dirtier and more frightened than all the rest, scurried past; with a tin kettle tied to his coat-tail. Behind him raced a pack of mongrel dogs, snapping and snarling as loud as they could.

Peter the cat did not seem to like this part of the entertainment, for he arched his back and began to hiss; and Bluebell was busy quieting him

when she heard the voice of the White Owl again.

"The first part of the procession—English sports and pastimes—is now over," it announced, and immediately went to sleep again.

"What do you think of it?" asked the fat boy.

"Oh, it's lovely. Better than the Lord Mayor's Show," Bluebell answered; when suddenly she heard in the distance, where the procession had disappeared, a sound like a great bell booming.

Ding-dong! Ding-dong! Ding-dong! said the bell.

"What is that?" she asked.

"That," announced the fat boy, "is the welkin."

"What is it ringing for?" Bluebell could not help asking.

"What would be the use of a welkin," retorted the fat boy, "if it didn't ring?"

"I really don't know," said the little girl. "I'm not quite sure what a welkin is."

"What ignorance!" snapped Blib.

"A welkin," said the fat boy judicially, "is an animal whose habits are very interesting. Unlike most animals, it is always heard and never seen. Its manners are so good that it never speaks unless it is spoken to. It is fed chiefly on shouts and other noises. And when it is pleased, it rings!"

The thin boy pinched Bluebell's arm. "Shout to it," he said.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she answered indignantly.

"All right," said the thin boy. "Then it will stop ringing."

And it did.

At this juncture the White Owl suddenly woke up and cleared its throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen," it announced, "the procession of the Yellow Dwarf will now appear. He is in a very bad temper, and trespassers will be prosecuted."

The twins turned very pale, and nudged one another, while they looked at Bluebell.

"I say, let's go," whispered Blib.

"Come on," said Blob, and caught the little girl by the arm. "Remember, he heard you call him an ugly little monster."

"I don't care," answered Bluebell boldly, for the two boys looked so terrified that even Peter the cat smiled contemptuously, "I came here to find the Sleepy King, and I sha'n't go until I've done it."

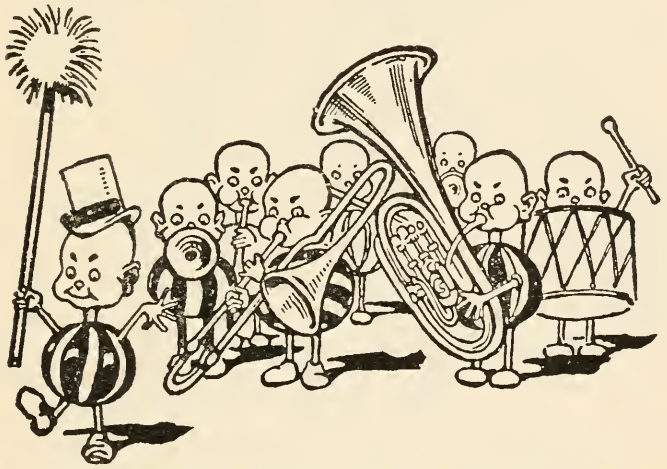
"She'll catch it!" remarked the fat boy.

"It isn't our fault," said the thin boy. "We never said a word against him."

But their faces were very white when the leaders

appeared in sight, and Bluebell could hear their teeth chattering.

This time it was a most magnificent procession that came into view, and it was headed by the Brownies' Band in full uniform. They were all



THIS TIME IT WAS A MOST MAGNIFICENT PROCESSION THAT CAME INTO VIEW, AND IT WAS HEADED BY THE BROWNIES' BAND IN FULL UNIFORM.

playing on instruments several sizes too large for them, and puffing and blowing like little grampuses. In front of them was a ridiculously tiny little Brownie, very fat and very red in the face, twirling a kitchen mop in his hand to mark time.

"What a ridiculous little man," said Bluebell.

"His father," remarked the fat boy, "was a drum-major. He's only a drum-minor! That's why he's so small."

Immediately behind the band there came marching, two and two, all the animals that lived in Noah's Ark, and several more besides. They were very stiff in the joints, as though they had been carved out of wood, but their colors looked lovely in the sun. There were blue animals, and green ones; and orange-colored beasts with spots and stripes on them, and purple ones with long tails. But they seemed to have been fighting on the way, for some of them had broken legs; and one of the elephants had got half his trunk knocked off. But Bluebell thought they looked splendid, and was quite disappointed that even the fat boy was at a loss to know all their names. They were followed by Mr. and Mrs. Noah and their family, dressed in long cloaks and shovel hats, and walking even more stiffly than the animals themselves.

But Blob accounted for this by reminding her that they had been a good many years on the road.

After the Noah's Ark came a magnificent gentleman, with a beard which hung down to his waist, and which was of the brightest possible blue. He carried a bunch of keys in his hand, and was fol-

lowed by a procession of ladies. Each of them had a spare head in her hand,—nice pink wax

IMMEDIATELY BEHIND THE BAND THERE CAME MARCHING, TWO AND TWO, ALL THE ANIMALS THAT LIVED IN NOAH'S ARK AND SEVERAL MORE BESIDES.

heads with blue eyes—; and the hair of each one was dressed in a different shape, like the faces you see in a barber's window.

"Who are those?" asked the little girl.

"Bluebeard and his wives," said the thin boy.

"But why do they carry those funny faces with them?" she asked.

"Because they have discovered," answered the fat boy, "that two heads are better than one."

Behind Bluebeard and his wives came a beautiful white Persian cat, with a blue ribbon round his neck, and a pair of patent leather top-boots on his legs. Peter stood up and made his best bow to him.

"Puss-in-Boots," said the fat boy as he passed. "First prize at the Crystal Palace!"

Next in order came Aladdin, with a wonderful electric lamp in his hand; then Cinderella and her ugly sisters, followed by a fairy prince carrying a glass slipper on a velvet cushion.

The ugly sisters were so lame that they could scarcely hobble along.

"What is the matter with them?" asked Bluebell.

"They've found out where the shoe pinches!" answered the fat boy.

Cinderella was followed by Robinson Crusoe, who looked like a girl in boy's clothes, and who was accompanied by a nigger carrying an enormous hot cross bun.

"Why does he do that?" asked the little girl.

"To show it's Good Friday!" replied Blob.

Then followed Jack the Giant Killer, with a fly-

paper on his hat, covered with gigantic bluebottles; the Babes in the Wood, in a motor perambulator; and an enormous prison van, containing the famous Forty Thieves.

NEXT IN ORDER CAME ALADDIN, WITH A WONDERFUL ELECTRIC LAMP IN HIS HAND.

And last of all, uglier than ever, came the Yellow Dwarf himself, on the back of his favorite charger, Fido the dragon.

It was a wonderful animal, with glittering scales

that shone in the sun like little rainbows, and eyes of bright green, like the signals on a railway line. Its mouth was wide open, and had a printed notice on it, which said :

THEN FOLLOWED JACK THE GIANT KILLER, WITH A FLY-PAPER ON HIS HAT COVERED WITH GIGANTIC BLUEBOTTLES.

Open daily from ten till six. Admission free!

The children stood up and the Yellow Dwarf stopped in front of them.

The two boys were so frightened that their knees knocked together, and they tried to hide behind one another. Peter the cat looked very indignant,

and arched his back, while the light of battle gleamed in his green eyes. But Bluebell walked boldly forward, and made her best courtesy.

"Good morning, Mister Yellow Dwarf," she said.

"*Yah!*" answered the Yellow Dwarf.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was not a promising beginning to a conversation, and Bluebell scarcely knew how to go on. Certainly the Yellow Dwarf was one of the most hideous little specimens she had ever seen; and yet, now that she was face to face with him, she was surprised to find that she was not nearly so frightened as she had expected to be. That is a curious thing that often happens to people who face difficulties.

She thought the dragon was the worse of the two, for it kept rolling its round green eyes in a most aggressive way, and it had quite the largest mouth she had ever seen. But the sight of the twins, shivering with fear, gave her courage, so she spoke again.

"If you please," she said, "I have come to find the hiding-place of the Sleepy King."

"*Yah!*" repeated the Yellow Dwarf.

"I don't quite know what that means," she continued. "But it sounds rather rude."

"Rude!" snarled the Yellow Dwarf. "How dare you speak to me of rudeness, you little vegetable! Who called me a hideous monster, eh?"

"I didn't know you then——" began Bluebell.

"You don't know me *now*," growled the Yellow Dwarf. "But you will before I've finished with you. Who said they weren't afraid of me, eh?"

He focused the twins with his solitary eye as he spoke, and they shriveled with terror.

"Please, it wasn't us," they answered. "It was her."

"You little cowards!" said Bluebell. "I said I wasn't afraid of you," she continued, "and I don't know why—but I'm not."

The Yellow Dwarf was rather taken aback.

"Oh, you're not, aren't you?" he said vindictively. "We'll soon see about that."

But he was really rather surprised, because he was so accustomed to frightening and bullying every one he met, that it was quite a new experience for him to find a little girl who said she was not afraid.

By this time, all the rest of the procession had disappeared, so that the children were left to face the Dwarf and his dragon by themselves. But the twins had not only sneaked away behind the trunk of the Magic Oak: they were doing

their best to hide under the shadow of a large toadstool. Blob succeeded pretty well, though Blib's long legs stuck out in the most ludicrous fashion. And Bluebell found herself with no other protector than Peter the cat.

Much to her astonishment she found that Peter was so proud of his position that he was visibly swelling with importance; swelling so fast that he was already nearly double his ordinary size. He had taken up the fighting attitude in which he was in the habit of repelling the attacks of stray dogs.

The Yellow Dwarf glared at him for a moment, then he turned to the little girl.

"How dare you trespass on my property?" he asked angrily.

"I didn't know that it belonged to you," she answered. "I came here to find the hiding-place of the Sleepy King."

"Who sent you?" asked the Yellow Dwarf.

"The Fairy of the Forest," answered Bluebell.

The Yellow Dwarf showed all his ugly teeth in an angry grin.

"Then you can go back to her," he said, "and tell her that the Sleeping King is not to be disturbed."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," she answered. "Besides, she promised to take care of me; so I don't believe that you can really do me any harm."

"I could eat you, if I chose to," snarled the Dwarf. "I often eat little girls like you, only I don't happen to be hungry. Do you intend to go away or not?"

BUT THE TWINS HAD NOT ONLY SNEAKED AWAY BEHIND THE TRUNK OF THE MAGIC OAK: THEY WERE DOING THEIR BEST TO HIDE UNDER THE SHADOW OF A LARGE TOADSTOOL.

From behind the trunk of the Magic Oak came the frightened voices of the twins.

"Please, sir," they said, "we'll take her away if you will allow us to."

The Yellow Dwarf made a hideous grimace at them.

"If either of those boys speaks to me again."

he remarked, "I will have them both roasted alive for Fido's dinner."

The dragon smacked his lips and wagged his tail. And, all the while, Bluebell noticed that Peter the cat was steadily growing. He had become a very formidable animal indeed; with enormous claws; and the Yellow Dwarf glared at him out of the corner of his solitary eye.

"What do you call that thing?" he asked. Bluebell patted Peter on the head.

"That is Peter the cat," she answered proudly.

"What is he staring at me for?" growled the Dwarf.

"A cat may look at a king," replied the little girl.

"I'm not a king," said the Dwarf, uneasily. "He has no business to look at me. For the last time, are you going away, or are you not?"

"No," said Bluebell boldly, "I'm not!"

The Yellow Dwarf scratched his head, and thought.

"Very well," he said, at last. "Then you must take the consequences."

He climbed down from his charger's back, and walked up to the Magic Oak; and he kicked three times on the trunk of it.

At the third kick the trunk flew open like a door, and Bluebell saw that there was a staircase inside

it, carpeted with red baize, and leading down to the lower regions.

"That staircase," said the Yellow Dwarf, "leads to the hiding-place of the Sleeping King. I have business elsewhere, and I shall leave Fido,

AT THE THIRD KICK THE TRUNK FLEW OPEN LIKE A DOOR, AND BLUEBELL SAW THAT THERE WAS A STAIRCASE INSIDE IT, CARPETED WITH RED BAIZE.

the dragon, in charge of it. If you can pass him, the Magic Oak is yours! If not, you, and the boys, and Peter the cat will all be roasted alive, and eaten for dinner on that silly tablecloth which you have spread there under the trees."

He called up Fido, and placed him in front of

the opening. Then he pressed a button on the dragon's head, and the round green eyes changed to brilliant red ones.

"Those," said the Yellow Dwarf, "are danger signals!"

Bluebell looked at Peter the cat, who had now grown to the size of an ordinary tiger. To her surprise she noticed that *his* eyes were red too.

"So are those!" she answered. And Peter purred with pride.

But the Yellow Dwarf took no notice. He gave a whistle; and the white owl flew down from his perch and settled on his master's shoulder.

"Now, you little vegetable!" said the Yellow Dwarf. "If you don't want to be roasted alive, you had better go home as quick as ever you can."

He turned on his heel, and strode away into the forest. The white owl nodded sleepily to Bluebell as it passed.

"Good-night, little girl," it said; and went to sleep again.

No sooner were they out of sight, than the twins crept out from their hiding-place. Their faces were as white as chalk, and they looked very limp and dejected.

"A nice mess you've got us into, you and your Sleepy King!" said the thin boy. "Bah!"

"Roasted alive for Fido's dinner!" added the fat boy. "Bah!"

They walked all round the dragon at a respectful distance, and tried to peer over his shoulder into the interior of the Magic Oak. Fido growled and showed his teeth.

And suddenly, while his head was turned aside, Peter the cat, all claws and bristles, sprang at the dragon's throat. Then there began such a wonderful fight as never was seen before. They talk of it in the Enchanted Glade to this day, and all the evening papers came out that afternoon with special editions, headed in big letters:

"ACCOUNT OF THE BIG FIGHT."

Just at first, it looked as if Fido the dragon were going to have the best of it; for Peter, though he had grown to a larger size than any other cat in the world, had never fought with a dragon before; and besides, he was not nearly so heavy as his enemy. They rolled over one another, snapping, snarling, and growling all the time; and the sound of the scrimmage brought all the animals in the Enchanted Glade hurrying up to see what was going on.

The rabbits sat up on their hind legs, and clapped their front paws whenever Peter seemed

to have an advantage, because they had all taken a fancy to Bluebell; and the dragon was very unpopular indeed.

The little girl was terribly frightened that her favorite would get hurt, and she wanted the twins to help him. But the fat boy declined to interfere.

"Fair play is a jewel," he remarked. "And a cat," he added, "can always come up to the scratch!"

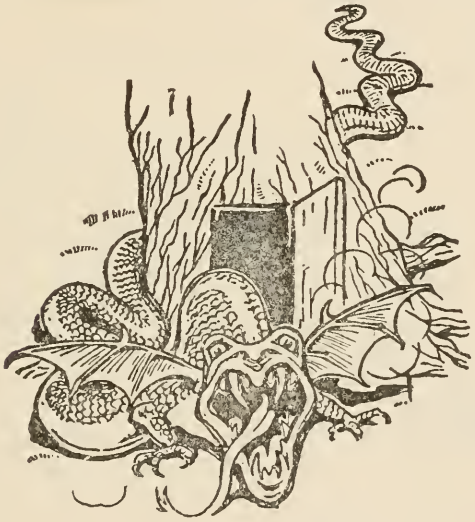
At the end of three minutes, when both the animals were panting, and covered with foam and dust, a golden pheasant pulled out his watch from his pocket and called "Time."

The adversaries separated; and the twins, seeing that Peter the cat was the more popular of the two, ran to his corner and fanned him with their handkerchiefs, while Bluebell examined him carefully to see whether he was seriously hurt.

At first nobody seemed inclined to go to Fido's assistance, until the mad old gray rabbit, whom Bluebell had annoyed, suddenly appeared on the scene. She pulled off her bonnet, and set to work to fan the dragon with it, until the golden pheasant looked at his watch and called "Time" again.

Peter immediately dashed away from his two supporters, and hit the dragon a tremendous blow

in the left eye. The dragon retorted by hitting him on the nose with his tail, which it wielded in the most wonderful manner; and an excited argu-



THEY WALKED ALL ROUND THE DRAGON AT A RESPECTFUL DISTANCE, AND TRIED TO PEEK OVER HIS SHOULDER INTO THE INTERIOR OF THE MAGIC OAK. FIDO GROWLED AND SHOWED HIS TEETH.

ment arose among the spectators as to whether this was fair or not. The black rabbit, whom they appealed to as umpire, decided in Fido's favor.

Meanwhile the crowd had increased to hundreds,

and the excitement was simply tremendous. Of the combatants themselves, nothing could be seen but a confused mass of fur, claws, red eyes, glistening scales, and dust.

"Time!" called the golden pheasant. "End of round two."

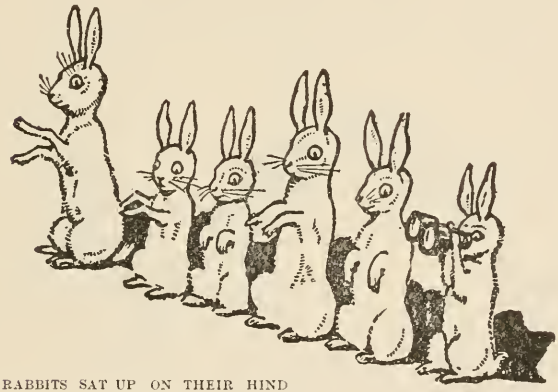
And when the pair separated, it was seen the dragon's left eye was completely closed. Whereupon all the animals cheered, except the gray rabbit, who was heard explaining at great length to her champion her views on fighting; all the sentences beginning: "And though, in a general way——" Fido looked rather sorry for himself.

Then the golden pheasant called "Time!" once more; and the third round began. It was a great surprise to everybody; for Peter was struck by a brilliant idea. He dodged round on Fido's blind side until he saw his opportunity; then he suddenly sprang upon the dragon's back; pressed the button on his head; and reversed the danger signals.

The red eyes changed to green again, and the fight was over. Because, as everybody knows, a dragon cannot fight properly with green eyes. The old gray rabbit solemnly took a sponge out of a black bag which she carried on her arm, and threw it into the air. And the golden pheasant called out:

"Three cheers for Peter the Great!"

And all the animals shouted until their little throats were sore. They crowded round Peter, and shook him by the paw; and they brought



THE RABBITS SAT UP ON THEIR HIND LEGS AND CLAPPED THEIR FRONT PAWS WHENEVER PETER SEEMED TO HAVE AN ADVANTAGE.

him a big bowl of milk, for he was naturally very thirsty after his hard work. Then they got a stretcher and wheeled Fido the dragon away to the hospital, with the mad gray rabbit in attendance upon him.

And Peter, having won his battle, quietly subsided again to his everyday size. Bluebell was so

surprised at this that she remarked upon it to the twins.

"The explanation of that," said the fat boy, "is very simple. You exaggerated Peter's importance, and thought him a bigger person than he really is. The victory was entirely due to us."

"It wasn't," said Bluebell indignantly. "You little cowards! You went and hid under a mushroom."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted the thin boy. "It was a toadstool. I tasted it."

"You were afraid even to speak to the Yellow Dwarf! Peter was not afraid to fight with a dragon."

"Peter," said the fat boy, "being a cat, has nine lives; and he only risked one of them. We had only one to lose, so we resorted to diplomacy, and arranged this glorious victory."

Blib shook his brother warmly by the hand. "Yes," he said. "We are diplomatists, and she doesn't even know what that means."

"A diplomatist," explained the fat boy, "is a person who arranges glorious victories, without the bother of fighting himself."

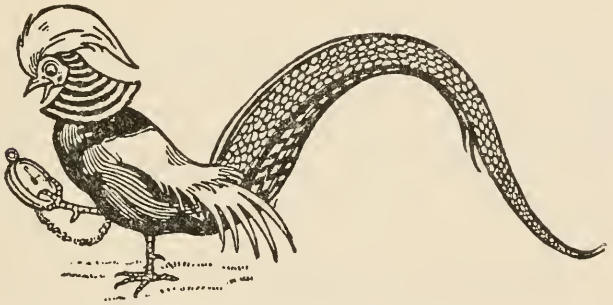
"Then I know which I admire most," said Bluebell decidedly; as she stroked Peter's head.

"Naturally!" said Blob. "Girls always admire soldiers. They have no discrimination."

"I say," remarked the thin boy, "what are we going to do next?"

"I don't know about you," said the little girl. "But Peter and I are going to wake up the Sleepy King. That is what we came here for."

"Suppose," suggested Blob, "that this is a trap of the Yellow Dwarf's to get us underground and keep us there?"



AT THE END OF THREE MINUTES, WHEN BOTH THE ANIMALS WERE PANTING, AND COVERED WITH FOAM AND DUST, A GOLDEN PHEASANT PULLED OUT HIS WATCH FROM HIS POCKET AND CALLED "TIME."

"If you're afraid," answered Bluebell, "you can stay here till we get back. Come on, Peter."

Peter sprang to his feet and followed her; and, at this moment, the golden pheasant fastened a medal on his chest, with V. C. on it.

"Oh, how pretty!" said the little girl. "What does it stand for?"

"Victorious Cat! of course," answered Blib. "Isn't she ignorant?"

The animals all crowded round the entrance to the Magic Oak, as the children prepared to enter, though none of them attempted to follow. Perhaps they felt the importance of the expedition, because the king had been asleep for nearly two hundred years; and it might be a very risky experiment to awaken him.

But they all admired Bluebell's courage; and as she stepped into the open door of the Magic Oak, followed by Peter the cat and the two boys, she felt that she was on the eve of a great adventure. And the last sound the little girl heard, as she descended, was the shout of her little friends above:

"Three cheers for Bluebell and Peter the cat!"

"Hooray!" yelled the twins.

CHAPTER IX.

Down—down—down—they went; for it seemed as if the red baize staircase would never come to an end. It turned and twisted in and out among the roots of the Magic Oak, and it had lovely red ropes and tassels for balusters. At intervals there were long level passages leading to the next flight, and out of these passages there were hundreds of smaller ones branching away in different directions. For this was the underground home of the fairies; and the population is a very large one indeed. But none of the inhabitants were in sight, because they had been warned of the coming of the mortals; and besides, they don't like cats.

Above their heads, as they descended, the children could see the under side of the Magic Carpet which they had admired in the Enchanted Glade. The roots of the flowers and trees and grasses were all carefully twisted together and finished off with knots, very neatly tied.

But it isn't nearly so pretty from underneath," said Bluebell.

"The reason of that," answered the fat boy, "is that you are looking at the seamy side. There are two sides to everything, but one side isn't always what it seems!"

He winked as usual, but it was such a silly joke that even Blib did not laugh much, and Bluebell and Peter took no notice whatever.

As they got further down, the light began to grow dim, until at last the children could only see a faint little streak of daylight away up above their heads. But when they turned the corner into the next passage, they found that it was lighted with little electric lamps, in pretty pink shades. And the next passage they came to was lighted with blue shades, and the third with yellow ones. The effect was very pretty indeed. And still the winding staircase led down—down—down.

They had come so far, and it seemed such a distance from the open air of the Enchanted Glade, that the children grew silent as they went lower and lower, and for some minutes nobody spoke a word. The twins were beginning to get rather nervous, but Bluebell went boldly on, for she was longing to reach the kingdom of the Sleeping King. And the lights grew brighter and brighter at every turn, until at last there came from below

a tinkling sound as if hundreds of tiny little voices were laughing all together.

The little girl paused and listened.

"What is that?" she asked.

"Somebody is laughing," answered the thin boy.

"It can't be much of a joke," said his brother, "if they can't laugh louder than that."

"I dare say it is as good as yours are," retorted Blib.

"Anyhow, I am glad they are in a good temper, whoever they may be," said Bluebell.

"I don't quite see," remarked Blob critically, "why you should call a temper good. Some tempers are worse than others, but——"

BLUEBELL DESCENDS THE MAGIC STAIRS.

"Oh, shut up!" interrupted Blib. And Peter purred approval.

Down—down—down. The lights grew brighter and more numerous at every turn, the sound of the little voices clearer and more distinct; until at last Bluebell, closely followed by Peter the cat, rounded the last corner, and stopped short in surprise. For they had reached the Golden Cave, the hiding-place of the Sleeping King. And that was one of the most marvelous places in all the world.

It was an enormous cavern which stretched away as far as you could see in every direction, with walls, and ceilings, and pillars, and arches of pure gold. And the roof of it was studded with innumerable lights of every color and shape, which corresponded exactly with the pattern of the carpet that grew up above. And the reason of that was that the fairies might know how the flowers were growing overhead. Because, in Fairyland, whenever a flower dies or is picked, the light which corresponds to it goes out. Then it is the duty of the fairies to select another flower of the same color, and plant it at night when nobody is looking. There were three vacancies where Blib had plucked the crocuses.

It was some time before the children's eyes grew accustomed to the glitter and dazzle of the scene, and they sat down upon the lowest step of the staircase to take it all in. Then Bluebell discovered where the sound of laughter had come from.

On every side the Golden Cave was full of tiny imps, gnomes, and goblins, dressed from head to foot in golden clothes. They were so small that the very tallest of them would not have reached above Blib's knees, and they had wicked, mischievous little faces. As they raced and hurried and danced round and round the pillars, they

AS THEY RACED AND HURRIED AND DANCED ROUND AND ROUND THE PILLARS, THEY JINGLED LIKE THOUSANDS OF TINY MONEY BAGS

jingled like thousands of tiny money bags. But they did not seem to notice the children in the least.

"Who are those?" asked Bluebell in a whisper.

"The Imps of Avarice and the Goblins of Gold," answered Blib.

And as they danced and jingled hither and thither, Bluebell had time to notice the patterns of their dresses, and they seemed curiously familiar to

her, though she could not remember where she had seen them before. On the front of them was embroidered a queen's head, and on their backs a representation of a gentleman on horseback with a drawn sword killing a dragon. Suddenly she remembered the gold coin which she had received from the old gentleman in the Strand; it had been marked just like that.

"They look exactly like ten-shilling pieces," she whispered to the twins.

"Of course they do," replied the fat boy.

"They are dressed in the livery of the usurper, and he's only half-a-sovereign!"

But Bluebell, now that her eyes had grown accustomed to the glare, and her ears to the jingle of the golden goblins, was eagerly gazing at the figure in the centre of the Golden Cave, whom she knew at once to be the Sleeping King himself.

Seated on a golden throne, fast asleep, was an old, old man, with long white hair and a white beard that flowed down over his knees on to the ground, and far away beyond his feet. It stretched and spread so far in front of him that the goblins, as they danced in laughing circles round the throne, had to leap into the air to clear it as they passed. Sometimes one, more mischievous than the rest, stooped and pulled it, and the rest shrieked with laughter as the old man moaned in his sleep.

He was so much bent and doubled with age that he had shriveled and wizened until he was only about double the size of the goblins themselves;

SEATED ON A GOLDEN THRONE, FAST ASLEEP, WAS AN OLD, OLD MAN, WITH LONG WHITE HAIR AND A WHITE BEARD THAT FLOWED DOWN OVER HIS KNEES ON TO THE GROUND.

but his dress was far more gorgeous than theirs, and of quite a different pattern. Embroidered upon it were the profiles of a king and a queen,

with the shields of three kingdoms in the form of a cross.

"What a lovely dress," said Bluebell.

"That," announced the fat boy, "is a sovereign two hundred years old. He was struck in the reign of William and Mary, and the stroke has lasted two centuries!"

But Bluebell was full of pity for the helpless old king, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Poor, poor old man," she said.

"Rot!" said the thin boy elegantly. "He's the richest man in the world."

"But what is the good of his money," asked the little girl, "when he can't use it?"

"When he was awake," remarked the fat boy, "he used to be a miser. And a miser is a person whose money is of no use to himself or to any one else."

The old king turned restlessly from side to side and groaned in his sleep.

"How he must have suffered," said Bluebell.

"I shouldn't mind suffering from the same complaint," said the fat boy. "After all, he's only an old thief. All this gold belongs to Blib and me."

"So it does," remarked the thin boy.

"Let's take some to go on with."

He reached out his hand to a pile of golden

sovereigns, but the next moment he dropped them in surprise.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "they burn my fingers."

HE REACHED OUT HIS HAND TO A PILE OF GOLDEN SOVEREIGNS, BUT THE NEXT MOMENT HE DROPPED THEM IN SURPRISE

"Money," remarked the fat boy, "has a way of burning people's fingers. That is why they let it slip through them."

And the goblins, who seemed to have noticed

the children for the first time, burst into a shout of malicious laughter.

"It burned his fingers," they sneered. "Ha, ha! it burned his fingers."

"Silly little idiots," muttered the thin boy angrily. But the golden goblins only laughed the more.

Bluebell rose from her seat and went towards them.

"What are you going to do?" asked the fat boy.

"I am going," said the little girl quietly, "to wake the Sleeping King."

She had scarcely spoken the words when the angry goblins swarmed viciously around.

"No, no," they shouted. "Leave him alone. He belongs to us."

And the old king turning in his sleep, moaned again.

Bluebell advanced slowly towards him, with Peter the cat by her side, while the angry goblins clung furiously about her ragged skirts; pulling, tearing, and fighting with one another to hold her back.

"Leave him alone," they shrieked. "He's ours, he's ours. Leave him alone."

The twins began to grow frightened again. They went up two or three steps to get clear of the

crowd, and the fat boy made a speech to the little imps.

"Goblins," he said. "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I want to remind you that my

THEY WENT UP TWO OR THREE STEPS TO GET CLEAR OF THE CROWD, AND THE FAT BOY MADE A SPEECH TO THE LITTLE IMPS.

brother and I are not in any way responsible for this little girl's interference."

"Hear, hear," shouted the goblins in chorus.

"We have no desire," continued the fat boy, "to disturb our royal ancestor's repose."

"Hear, hear," yelled the goblins again.

"You are two little cowards!" said Bluebell indignantly. And she pressed slowly forward, for the goblins were swarming round her in such numbers that she could scarcely move.

For the third time the old king turned in his troubled sleep and moaned again.

"Take care," shouted the thin boy anxiously. "Perhaps he'll hurt us."

"Better let sleeping kings lie," added his brother. "Perhaps he'll bite."

But Bluebell had forced her way slowly on, through the struggling crowd of goblins until she stood at last, panting and excited, face to face with the Sleeping King himself. She had stretched out a hand to touch him when a shrill voice cried:

"*Lights out.*"

And in an instant the Golden Cave was plunged in darkness.

In the pause which followed, Bluebell heard the sound of the jingling, clattering imps grow fainter and fainter as it faded into the distance and died away; and she heard, too, the scrambling flight of the twins as they scuttled up the staircase in terror.

Then, to her relief, for the sudden darkness had startled her, she heard the faint tinkle of the silver

"Wake up, your Majesty," said the little girl again.

bells which had warned her of the unseen presence of the good Fairy of the Forest. And, just as she realized that she was quite safe, the lights shone out again, and she found that the angry goblins had disappeared. The twins were creeping down the staircase hand in hand to see what would happen next; and she stood alone, except for her faithful cat, before the throne of the Sleeping King.

For a moment she paused; then she stepped forward and laid a hand lightly upon his shoulder.

"Wake up, your Majesty!" she said timidly. "Wake up!"

The old man stirred uneasily, and stiffly stretched his weary limbs. Slowly his eyes opened, and he tried to raise a shaking hand. The twins came creeping down the staircase.

"Wake up, your Majesty!" said the little girl again. "Wake up!"

And the Sleeping King awoke! His poor old hands trembled as he shielded his eyes from the glare of the lights around him, and his poor old knees knocked together as he sought in vain to rise from his golden throne.

In dazed and vacant fashion he gazed upon the little girl and tried to speak.

"Where am I?" he muttered at last. His voice was weak and childish. He had not used it for two hundred years.

"In the Golden Cave, your Majesty," answered the little girl. And the twins came creeping closer.

The old man raised a trembling hand to his head, and his wrinkled face quivered as he slowly began to realize where he was.

"I think I must have been asleep," he murmured.

"Your Majesty has slept for two hundred years," answered Bluebell.

He looked at her in a dreamy, uncertain way, as if he scarcely understood.

"Two hundred years," he repeated. "She said —two hundred years."

The jeweled scepter fell from his nerveless hand as he tried in vain to raise himself to his feet, and his trembling limbs refused to support him.

"Lean on me," said the little girl.

Very slowly and carefully she raised him from his golden throne, and, as he tottered to his aching feet and leaned upon her for support, his crown slipped from his tired old head, and broke into two pieces as it struck the floor.

The fat boy picked them up.

"Two half-crowns," he remarked, as he tried to fit them together. "That's all the change you get, if you go and tamper with a sovereign!"

CHAPTER X.

It was several minutes before the poor old king had thoroughly awakened and realized his position. And this was not to be wondered at, for two hundred years is a very long sleep indeed; and there are plenty of people who make quite a fuss about getting up in the morning when they have only been in bed for one night.

Besides, his limbs were very stiff, and ached a good deal; so that just at first it was only with Bluebell's help that he could manage to hobble along at all. Then his beard had grown so long and straggly that he had a great deal of trouble in avoiding it, for he was constantly tripping and stumbling, to the great amusement of the twins.

For Blib and Blob, having discovered that the old man was quite harmless, and that there was no danger, were not at all inclined to be respectful about his personal appearance, on which they commented audibly.

"I say," remarked the thin boy, "you'd look ever so much better without a beard. Shall I take it off for you?" And he produced a knife with a very jagged edge for the king's inspection.

"Don't talk to the old Guy Fawkes as if he were an oyster," said the fat boy. "He can keep his beard on if he likes."

And the old king decided that he would, for Blib's knife did not look very tempting, and nobody had any scissors. He was beginning to recover some of his dignity; not very much, of course, but enough to get on with. For, if you come to think of it, it must be a very difficult thing to be properly dignified when you have dwindled down to so small a size as his. And besides, he could not help remembering that his long sleep had been the fairy's punishment to him; so that he felt rather like a naughty boy who has been put to bed for disobedience. And kings are not accustomed to feel like that, which accounts for some of the curious things they do.

However, the old man was really most grateful to Bluebell for having awakened him, for he fully recollected the conditions which the fairy had imposed upon him. He was most eager to hear all the news, and what had been happening in the world above while he was asleep.

"Things have changed a good deal, I suppose," he said.

"They have," answered Blob. "Queen Anne's dead, for one!"

But the king took very little notice of him; perhaps he had gone to sleep before Queen Anne came to the throne; and besides, he was much more interested in Bluebell than he was in the twins.

"You have earned your reward, little girl," he said. "And one of the magic gifts which the fairy left with me shall be yours."

"What do we get, old man?" asked Blib.

"You will very likely get into trouble," replied the king, "unless you are more civil."

He took the little girl by the hand, and with her help he hobbled across the cavern to a magnificent jeweled casket, which he opened. From its recesses he produced the fairy's magic gifts. And they were a doll, a violin, and a box of colored lights. Each of them was made of solid gold.

"These," said the old king, "are the presents which the fairy deposited here two hundred years ago; and they have wonderful powers, if their owner comes by them honestly. For whoever possesses them is entitled to three wishes; and no matter what they may be, they will be granted immediately."

"I think," said the fat boy, "that I will take the violin."

"I think you will wait until you're asked," answered the king. "Bluebell may take her choice, for it was she who awakened me. But the other presents will not be awarded until they have been hung upon the Christmas tree in my castle. Then they will be presented to those who win them fairly."

"What rot!" said the fat boy.

The old king took no notice, but turned to the little girl.

"Which do you choose?" he asked.

"Please, I think I'd like the doll best," she answered.

"Then the doll is yours," said the king. "But it must be hung with other presents from the branches of the Christmas tree before it attains the power of granting your wishes."

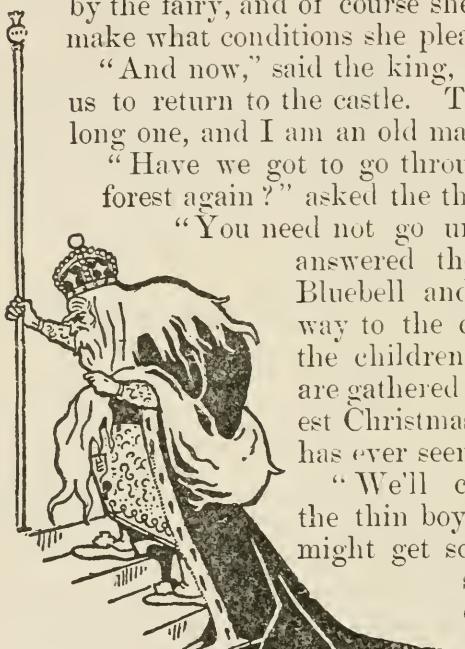
Bluebell thought this was rather a pity, for the doll was such a beautiful one that she was quite impatient to possess it, and she was rather puzzled to understand why it should not be given to her at once. But she remembered that Christmas presents generally reach their owners in rather a roundabout way; and there is just as much sense in hanging them on the branches of a tree as there is in putting them in a stocking. And, in any case,

these golden presents had been left with the king by the fairy, and of course she had a right to make what conditions she pleased.

"And now," said the king, "it is time for us to return to the castle. The journey is a long one, and I am an old man."

"Have we got to go through that beastly forest again?" asked the thin boy.

"You need not go unless you like," answered the king. "But Bluebell and I are on our way to the castle, where all the children in my domains are gathered round the largest Christmas tree the world has ever seen."



HE LED THE WAY, WALKING VERY SLOWLY AND LEANING UPON HIS JEWELED SCEPTER, WITH HIS LONG BEARD GATHERED UP AND TUCKED AWAY UNDER HIS ARM.

"We'll come too," said the thin boy. "Because we might get some magic presents," he added.

"Besides," continued the fat boy, "this little girl may require our protection on the way. As we have brought her safely so far, we

had better see her through the rest of her adventures."

Bluebell laughed, for she knew what shocking

BLUEBELL CAME NEXT, CARRYING A LITTLE BAG WHICH CONTAINED THE THREE GOLDEN PRESENTS.

little cowards the twins had shown themselves whenever there had been any real danger; and she was quite certain the only reason that they intended to accompany the old king was for the chance of the

presents which might be given them. And for the same reason the two boys were a little more civil than before. For it is a curious thing how polite and agreeable people can make themselves when they think that they have something to gain by it.

So the little party prepared to climb the red baize staircase which led to the Enchanted Glade, accompanied this time by the old king, who was beginning to recover the use of his limbs and to get over his stiffness.

He led the way, walking very slowly and leaning upon his jeweled scepter, with his long beard gathered up and tucked away under his arm. Bluebell came next, carrying a little bag which contained the three golden presents, and accompanied by Peter the cat with his medal round his neck. And the twins followed, side by side, Blob still bearing his beloved fishing rod, and Blib carrying with him the broken halves of the royal crown, which his brother had picked up.

As they made their way up the staircase, and paused now and then for a rest in one of the passages, Bluebell thought she could hear the whispering voices of the fairies who were eager to witness the departure of the old king who had slept undisturbed so long in their underground regions. And here and there she even fancied she caught a glimpse

of a tiny figure whisking suddenly out of sight at their approach. For it was evident that their queen, the Fairy of the Forest, had given them very strict instructions to keep out of sight.

In one or two of the corridors the king turned

THEN HE LED HER TO THE PASSAGE OF THE LITTLE MUSHROOM GROWERS, WHO EACH HAVE AN ALLOTTED NUMBER OF MUSHROOMS TO PLANT EVERY NIGHT WHEN ALL THE WORLD HAS GONE TO SLEEP.

aside for a minute to show Bluebell a few of the secrets and mysteries of underground Fairyland. And it was a strange sight to see the wizened and decrepit little old man hobbling along with the aid of his scepter, and explaining the wonders of the place to the eager little girl.

He told her how the fairies do their work, quite silently and unseen; and he showed her the passage where the tiny gardeners live whose duty it is to replenish the empty flower-beds in the world above. Then he led her to the passage of the little mushroom growers, who each have an allotted number of mushrooms to plant every night when all the world has gone to sleep. And he told her how, when their work is finished, they generally dance round and round in the moonlight, and leave dark green circles on the grass, which mortals call fairy rings.

And in one passage they saw an arrangement of tiny engines, and wheels, and pipes, and pulleys, which the fairies use to pump up to the surface the water which silly mortals call a spring. And when the fairies rest from their labors, which only happens when the weather is too hot for them to work, people say there is a drought, because the wells and springs run dry.

Bluebell was quite sorry that she could not be allowed to watch the little folk at work, and she asked the old king what was happening in the meantime to the stream overhead.

"It is beginning to run low," answered the king, "and in time it would dry up altogether. But before that can happen we shall have passed on, and the spring fairies will resume their task."

"In the meantime," announced the fat boy, "they have learned to let well alone."

He thought that was a very funny joke, and he kicked Blib for not laughing at it.

Then they all moved on, up the next flight of stairs, and passed the corridor where the rabbits live. From one of the little passages came a sound of squeaking, and the king explained that those were the rabbit nurseries.

And so, at last, they reached the top of the staircase, and passed out through the opening of the Magic Oak into the Enchanted Glade.

As he stepped out into the open air the old king drew a long breath, and shaded his eyes with his hand while he looked all round him.

"It is two hundred years," he said, "since last I saw the daylight."

Then he turned to the twins.

"Take a warning from me," he continued solemnly. "Beware of avarice; and no matter how much money you may acquire, never be tempted to hoard it up as I did."

"Just you give us a chance," said the fat boy. "We'll show you how to spend money fast enough. Won't we, Blib?"

"Rather!" said his brother.

But the old king sighed and shook his head.

The Enchanted Glade was quite empty, for

none of the animals were in sight; but the stream was running faster than ever, so it was evident that the fairies were making up for lost time. But, to Bluebell's great surprise, she found that the tablecloth, which she had helped to spread, was now covered from end to end with the most tempting and appetizing dishes.

There were all sorts of things such as hungry little girls generally see only in the cook-shop windows: steaming sausages and mashed potatoes, pies and pasties of every shape and size, tongues and chickens and shiny hams, sugared cakes, and fruit, and strawberries and cream, and jams and sweets of every kind in beautiful china dishes.

"Oh, I wonder who can have put them here," said Bluebell.

"The fairies," answered the king.

The little party sat down and had a most wonderful picnic, which Bluebell would have thoroughly enjoyed if only Dicky the shoeblack had been there to share it. The twins gorged and guzzled away as hard as ever they could go, and when their wonderful appetites began to show signs of wearing out, they threw cakes and apples at Peter the cat by way of amusing themselves.

But Peter took very little notice of them, because his own wants had been attended to, and

there was a large dish of fresh sardines and a bowl of cream waiting for him.

After the pies and sausages, the children ate pineapple ices, and strawberries and cream, and there was lemonade and cider for them to drink;

THE TWINS GORGED AND GUZZLED AWAY AS HARD AS EVER THEY COULD GO, AND WHEN THEIR WONDERFUL APPETITES BEGAN TO SHOW SIGNS OF WEARING OUT, THEY THREW CAKES AT PETER THE CAT BY WAY OF AMUSING THEMSELVES.

so that altogether Bluebell found it the very best meal she had ever tasted in her life. And as fast as they emptied a dish or a glass, a clean one appeared in its place, with a fresh knife and fork and spoon. But no hands were to be seen, and Bluebell could not understand it at all.

The old king began to explain that it was all the work of the fairies, who remained invisible to mortal eyes, when the fat boy interrupted him.

"That's all rot!" he remarked. "I don't believe in fairies."

He leaned forward as he spoke and helped himself to a large ripe peach. He had it carefully poised on the end of his fork, but scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when lo! it had vanished. He turned indignantly to Blib, and saw him grinning at the fairies' handiwork; whereupon the fat boy stuck the fork into the thin boy's leg; and the thin boy retaliated by throwing a hot sausage at his brother; and it was some little time before Bluebell and the king were able to restore order.

By this time everybody had eaten and drank as much as they wanted, and the twins a little more; so they prepared to set out on their journey through the forest. The meal seemed to have done the old king good, for his stiffness wore off as he proceeded, and he managed to get along pretty easily over the smooth grass carpet of the Enchanted Glade.

When they came to the edge of it, where the briers and brambles marked the entrance to the forest, they found to their surprise that a deputation of all the animals was drawn up waiting to

"A deputation of all the Animals was drawn up, waiting to receive them."

receive them, and to present the departing king with an illuminated address.

The Brownies' Band was in attendance, with the drum-minor at its head; and the golden pheasant was ready with a long speech. He began by congratulating the old king upon the friendly relations which had existed between them during his long stay in their midst.

"He couldn't have done much harm," said the fat boy, "considering that he was asleep all the time."

"Yes, he could," answered the black rabbit; "he might have snored."

The golden pheasant went on to say that he hoped the king would take an early opportunity of paying them another visit.

"Not likely," said the fat boy. "He won't be such a fool as to come back now. He's much too wide awake for that."

"If you were to talk a little less, and think a little more," said the golden pheasant, "it would be very much wiser."

"I'll try it," answered the fat boy, "when I have more time. But anyhow I couldn't think less than I do of you already."

"Silence!" shouted the black rabbit, "you're interrupting the speech."

So the golden pheasant finished his remarks,

and wished the old king good luck and long life. Then the old king returned his best thanks and accepted the illuminated address; after which the Brownies' Band struck up "God save the King," and all the animals gave three cheers, as the travelers started on their journey.

"How fond they are of cheering," said Bluebell, as she walked along by the king's side.

"A very cheery community," remarked the fat boy.

"I'm quite sorry to leave the Enchanted Glade behind," continued the little girl. "It was so pretty."

"Distance," replied Blob, "lends enchantment to the glade. And that is the reason it interests you."

"Why?" asked Bluebell.

"Because," replied the fat boy in his most pompous voice, "wherever there is a loan there is always interest"

CHAPTER XI.

Now, the road through the forest, much to Bluebell's delight, was very much easier on the return journey than they had found it when they came. In the first place, it was chiefly down-hill; in the second, there was neither storm nor darkness; and in the third, the old king led them by a pathway which avoided all the thickets and brambles through which the children had struggled when they were alone.

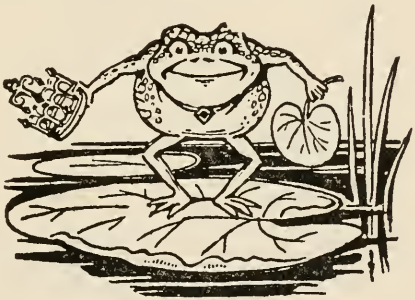
This time there were no Will-o'-the-Wisps to distract their attention, and no Yellow Dwarf to frighten them; and so they journeyed pleasantly along until they reached the kingdom of the bull-frogs. There they sat down again to rest in the Strangers' Gallery, and listened to another debate, which the busy little animals were croaking over as loud as ever.

Bluebell remarked that the Bullfrog Parliament seemed to be always sitting.

"Of course they are," answered the fat boy. "So would you if you were a bullfrog; they can't stand."

The King of the Bullfrogs was as civil as ever, for he sat up and took off his crown to Bluebell as soon as he caught sight of her.

But when he recognized the features of the



THE KING OF THE BULLFROGS WAS AS CIVIL AS EVER, FOR HE SAT UP AND TOOK OFF HIS CROWN TO BLUEBELL AS SOON AS HE CAUGHT SIGHT OF HER.

Sleepy King he got quite excited, and insisted on making a speech to him.

"Brother Potentate," he began, "I hope you have slept well."

Of course he meant it kindly, but Bluebell could not help thinking it was rather an unfortunate remark, because she knew that the old king's sleep had been a very troubled one.

"I wouldn't let an old frog call me brother," said the fat boy.

"If you had been shut up as long as I have," answered the old king, "you would be only too glad of the chance."

"You will be glad to hear," continued the bullfrog, "that I have completed an alliance with the Queen of the Toads. I am going to marry her only daughter."

"A frog he would a-wooing go," sang the thin boy promptly.

"She is a most accomplished princess," went on the bullfrog, "and she has a lovely voice. Indeed, she croaks like a nightingale. The wedding takes place next week."

"Whether his mother would let him or no," sang the thin boy, waving his fishing rod.

"I am an orphan," explained the bullfrog severely, "so that there is no necessity to obtain the sanction of my parents."

"Gammon and spinach," sang the twins.

"Silence!" said the old king. "If I hear another rude word from either of you boys, I shall forbid you to enter my castle doors."

Then he made a civil little speech to the King of the Bullfrogs, and congratulated him on his approaching marriage; after which they proceeded once more upon their way.

Soon they came again into the snowy district that surrounded the castle gardens, and the place where Bluebell had met the Fairy of the Forest; and the snow was just as warm and soft and cotton-woolly as when they had left it.

THEY WALKED THROUGH THE GARDEN WHERE THE LITTLE GIRL HAD FED THE GOLD-FISH; AND PETER THE CAT, WHO HAD NOT SEEN THEM BEFORE, TOOK THE VERY GREATEST INTEREST IN THEM.

They walked through the garden where the little girl had fed the gold-fish; and Peter the cat, who had not seen them before, took the very greatest interest in them. As they approached the castle itself, they could hear, through the open door, shouts of childish laughter; and once

more Bluebell looked down at her shabby frock and wondered whether the smart children inside would laugh at her.

And once more she wished that the Fairy of the Forest could have sent Dicky the shoeblack to keep her company. But she was really very happy on the whole, because she had succeeded in her task of awakening the Sleepy King; and now she was on her way to enjoy the wonderful Christmas tree, and to receive as her reward the golden doll who could grant her anything she wished for.

Suddenly she clapped her hands in glee. "I shall wish for Dicky the shoeblack!" she exclaimed aloud.

"Don't you hope you may get him?" said the fat boy, who hadn't a notion who Dicky was.

"I'm quite sure I shall," answered Bluebell.

By this time they had arrived at the great doors of the castle, which still stood wide open; for it is a peculiarity of Fairyland that even in the middle of winter the weather never gets too cold. So Bluebell, and the old king, and Peter the cat, and the twins stood upon the steps for a moment and looked in.

The huge Christmas tree twinkled and sparkled with thousands of colored lights, and its branches were covered with cotton-woolly snow. Perched

upon the top of it, which nearly reached to the ceiling of the hall, was a figure which the little girl recognized immediately.

It was the clown with the merry painted face, whom she had last seen in the window of a London toy shop; and he was still busy with his favorite amusement of balancing his hat upon one foot and kicking it on to his head. From his lofty position on the summit of the tree he was able to see the little party in the doorway, and Bluebell was not in the least surprised to see him smile and nod to her. She wondered who had succeeded in buying him, and how much he had cost.

All round the hall, as she had already seen from the garden, there were large tables covered with toys and presents of every kind and shape. There were dolls and Noah's arks; boxes of soldiers; puzzles and picture-books; animals with eyes that opened and shut and heads that waggled; cows that "mooed;" donkeys that brayed; Jack-in-the-boxes that shot up with a spring, grinned, and disappeared again; and hundreds of other presents waiting for their happy owners.

And in the large clear space between the Christmas tree and the tables were all the little children whom Bluebell had seen trooping through the forest on their way to the castle; and she thought their frocks were quite the loveliest things she had

ever seen. The children had just finished their tea, and were dancing Sir Roger De Coverley to help their digestions, which was an idea of the Regent's.

He was seated at one end of the hall on a beautiful throne with a golden canopy over it, and his face was beaming like a harvest moon. He had a crown on his head and a scepter in his hand, and six heralds were in attendance, three on each side of him. Behind the throne, in a little forest of palms and banners and trophies of armor, the Royal Band was playing dance music.

Just as this music and the children's laughter were at their height, one of the dancers, a little golden-haired girl, happened to catch sight of the group in the doorway. She stopped short, with her blue eyes and her little mouth wide open with surprise, and pointed to them.

"Look!" she said, "what a strange old man!"

The others stopped dancing, and the whole crowd came flocking to the doorway. But they did not approach very close, because they were a little bit startled at the appearance of the new arrivals.

And indeed they were a most curious addition to a Christmas party. Just fancy how surprised you would be, if you saw a group like this

waiting in the doorway, at the next party you go to.

First, a wizened little old man two hundred years old, with a white beard trailing down to the

A LITTLE GOLDEN-HAIRED GIRL HAPPENED TO CATCH SIGHT OF THE GROUP IN THE DOORWAY. SHE STOPPED SHORT, WITH HER BLUE EYES AND HER LITTLE MOUTH WIDE OPEN WITH SURPRISE, AND POINTED TO THEM.

ground. Next, a little flower-girl with bare legs, and a ragged frock torn and tattered by the brambles of the forest and the struggles of the Golden Goblins; with a cat by her side. And lastly, a

pair of extraordinary twins, one with a fishing rod in his hand, and the other carrying the two halves of the broken crown. No wonder the children stared!

A chubby little boy in a blue velvet suit, with bandy legs, pointed at the Sleepy King with a finger which was still sticky with raspberry jam.

"I believe it's Santa Claus!" he said.

"Oh!" said all the children, gazing at him in wonder and expectation.

"You're wrong," said the thin boy. "It isn't."

"Guess again," added his brother. "Blue Velvet goes to the bottom of the class."

It was curious, Bluebell thought, that none of the other children should recognize the twins, if they really had been invited to the castle as they had told her. But she had grown so accustomed to their peculiarities by this time that she made no remark.

In the meantime the music had stopped, and there was a sudden bustle and confusion among the children, who divided into two groups. And down the center of the hall came the plump figure of the Regent, with his six heralds in attendance. On the threshold of the castle he paused and looked at his visitors.

"Well, my friends, and who may you be? Eh, what?" he asked jerkily.

Then the old king spoke.
"I have returned," he said, simply.
"So I see, so I see," responded the Regent. "But

THE OTHERS STOPPED DANCING, AND THE WHOLE CROWD CAME FLOCKING TO THE DOORWAY.

I don't think I ever saw you before. Who are you and what's your business? Speak up, my man. Eh, what?"

Before he could answer, the fat boy chimed in.

"We have returned too!" he announced.

"Oh, I know all about you," said the Regent. "You are the two idle schoolboys who pretend that you are the heirs to the throne. Well, you may come in and get your Christmas presents if you'll promise to behave. But no rudeness, or out you go. Eh, what?"

The fat boy winked at the assembled company. "We propose," he said slowly, "to enter the castle without any invitation from you, and to bring our friends with us."

He waved his hand in the direction of the old king and Bluebell, including Peter the cat in the sweep of it.

"Now then, my boy," said the Regent, "don't be cheeky, or I'll have to turn you out."

"Now, then, Mr. Regent," mimicked the fat boy. "Don't you be cheeky, for we've come to turn you out! It isn't us who'll have to go!"

"That isn't grammar," said a precocious boy with a freckly face and sandy hair, who won all the prizes at school, and thought himself very clever.

"It may not be grammar, Freckles," answered Blob. "But it's true."

"Come, come," said the Regent, "we're wasting

time. Tell me who your friends are, and what they want. Eh, what?"

"This one," said Blob, pointing to Bluebell, "is a young lady whom my brother and I have rescued from some very dangerous adventures.

THE FAT BOY WINKED AT THE ASSEMBLED COMPANY.

That one is Peter the cat, whose life we saved in his fight with Fido the dragon. And that one," he continued, as he pointed to the old man," is his Majesty the Sleeping King, whose hiding-place we have just discovered."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Regent, "you don't say so?"

"I do," replied Blob. "Ask him."

"It is true," said the old king, "that I have slept for two hundred years and have only been awakened to-day. But it is to this little girl that I owe my deliverance."

The effect of his speech was quite wonderful. The Regent gasped until he almost choked, and had to be patted on the back by one of the heralds, while the children simply stared in blank astonishment.

"The Sleeping King has come back!" was all they could say.

Then the Regent spoke.

"Bring me," he said, "the portrait of the late king."

And a herald hurried off to fetch it.

"What is the use of a portrait two hundred years old?" asked the fat boy.

"I'm going to compare it with the original," said the Regent. "Eh, what?" he added, as soon as he had recovered his breath.

"Comparisons," said the fat boy solemnly, "are odious."

"So are rude little boys," said the precocious child with the sandy hair.

"Shut up, Freckles," said the fat boy.

"My name isn't Freckles," explained the boy. "It is Theodore."

"Is it really?" remarked Blob; "well, if I'd

been christened Theodore, I'd go out and drown myself."

"Would you?" answered the precocious boy viciously. "Then it's a great pity you weren't!"

By this time the herald had returned with an oil-painting executed by one of the old masters, and the Regent carefully examined it.

"The beard makes a difference," he remarked, "And this was a tall man, while you are only a little one."

"A little man," announced the fat boy, "sometimes goes a long way."

"But the nose is the same," continued the Regent. "And there is no doubt about the eyes."

"Then the eyes have it," said Blob.

"Well, well," said the Regent. "And so my reign is at an end."

"And a good job too," said Blib.

"Children," continued the Regent, "the Sleeping King has come back to his kingdom after two hundred years. I resign the throne in his favor. Give him a royal welcome. Eh, what?"

And he took the crown from his own head and placed it on that of the old man; gave him his jeweled scepter, and led him by the hand to the throne under the golden canopy. Then the band played "See the Conquering Hero," and the children shouted "Long live the Sleeping King."

"And now," said the old king, when he had made himself at home on the throne, "we will proceed with the entertainment which my arrival has interrupted. But first, welcome your new guests."

So they all flocked round Bluebell and the twins; and they shook the little girl by the hand and patted Peter the cat on the head. But they did not have much to say to the two boys, for Blib was busy pinching the cheeks of the bandy-legged boy with the jammy fingers, while Blob stealthily kicked the shins of the precocious Theodore.

Then the old king took from the little girl the bag containing the three golden presents, and he explained to the children the magic powers which they would possess when they had been hung upon the Christmas tree. Bluebell, he announced, had already been awarded the golden doll; but the other two presents would be drawn by lot.

So they brought a huge china bowl and filled it with tickets, all of which were blank, except two. On one was written *Violin*, and on the other, *Colored Lights*. Then all the children, with the exception of the little flower-girl, dipped their hands into the bowl and drew out a ticket.

But the fat boy, when nobody was looking, had turned up the corners of the two winning tickets;

and so, when his turn came, he drew the violin, and Blib the box of colored lights.

Then the three golden presents were attached to a branch of the Christmas tree, just underneath the clown with the merry face, and the old king spoke again.

"I have only to add," he said, "that if the presents have not been fairly won, it will be the worse for their owners."

He looked at the twins as he made this remark, and Blob winked at his brother.

"We've just changed the king," he said solemnly. "Perhaps we'd better change the subject!"

CHAPTER XII.

It certainly seemed to Bluebell that they had arrived at the castle just at the most interesting time, for the children had just finished their tea, and the best part of the fun was still to come. For the most satisfactory item in a Christmas party, as every one knows, is the distribution of the presents; and when they are placed upon the tree, as is the universal custom in Fairyland, the sight is one which it is worth going a very long way to see.

For it must be remembered that this particular tree was very nearly empty. It only contained the merry clown upon the top, a few thousand candles, and a load of cotton-woolly snow when the children arrived. To these the old king had added the three golden presents presented to him by the fairy; of which the doll had been awarded to Bluebell, the violin to Blob, and the box of colored lights to his brother. In the meantime its capacious branches were waiting to receive the

load of presents with which the tables were covered, and the Regent had devised so original an entertainment in connection with them, that the old king, on his accession to the throne, saw no reason to interfere with the arrangements which had been made.

So the children were all placed in a large semicircle in front of the royal throne, on one side of which had been hung up a large white screen with a sort of magic-lantern in front of it. And the Regent, who acted as the master of the ceremonies, took up his position by the king's side, with a huge roll of parchment in his hand.

When everything was ready, the heralds blew a loud blast upon their silver trumpets, and a picture appeared upon the screen. Everybody recognized it immediately as the portrait of the little boy with the bandy legs and the jammy fingers, and it was so like him that they all clapped their hands.

Then the Regent read out in a loud voice from his roll of parchment.

"Number one. A box of soldiers."

The bandy-legged boy stepped forward to receive it, and one of the heralds lifted the box of soldiers from the table and placed it upon the floor.

Immediately he did so, the strangest thing happened. Every soldier in the box promptly

came to life, and scrambled out on to the floor. And while the children stood open-mouthed to watch them, the band struck up a lively military march, and away went the soldiers round the Christmas tree, marching two and two in splendid time and step, as though they had been drilled to do it all their lives. Three times they marched round, while all the other children envied the little bandy-legged boy who was their proud possessor, and wondered whether their own presents would be as good as his.

In the meantime Blob, who had been roving about in search of mischief, had hit upon the happy thought of wandering into the tea room to see whether there was anything left to eat. He was presently led out by the ear by one of the royal pages, a big lump of cake in his hand and his mouth full.

"Serves you right," said Blib, who would have gone himself if he had thought of it. "You shouldn't be greedy. Enough is as good as a feast, and you had quite enough at the picnic."

"I didn't," said Blob with his mouth full.

"Then you ought to have," remarked Theodore, the precocious boy.

"If everybody did what they ought, Freckles," retorted Blob solemnly, "you would go and put your head in a bag, to hide your ugly face."

"Silence," shouted the king, and everybody looked at the fat boy. But he did not seem to care in the least, though Bluebell was quite

AND THE REGENT, WHO ACTED AS THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES, TOOK UP HIS POSITION BY THE KING'S SIDE, WITH A HUGE ROLL OF PARCHMENT IN HIS HAND.

ashamed of him; for he went on stolidly munching his cake without taking the slightest notice.

Meanwhile the soldiers had finished their manœuvres, and were all drawn up in line beside

their box. One of the heralds picked them up and replaced them; after which, at a sign from the king, he hung the box upon a branch of the Christmas tree, where the bandy-legged boy eyed it eagerly to see that no one else claimed it until it became his own.

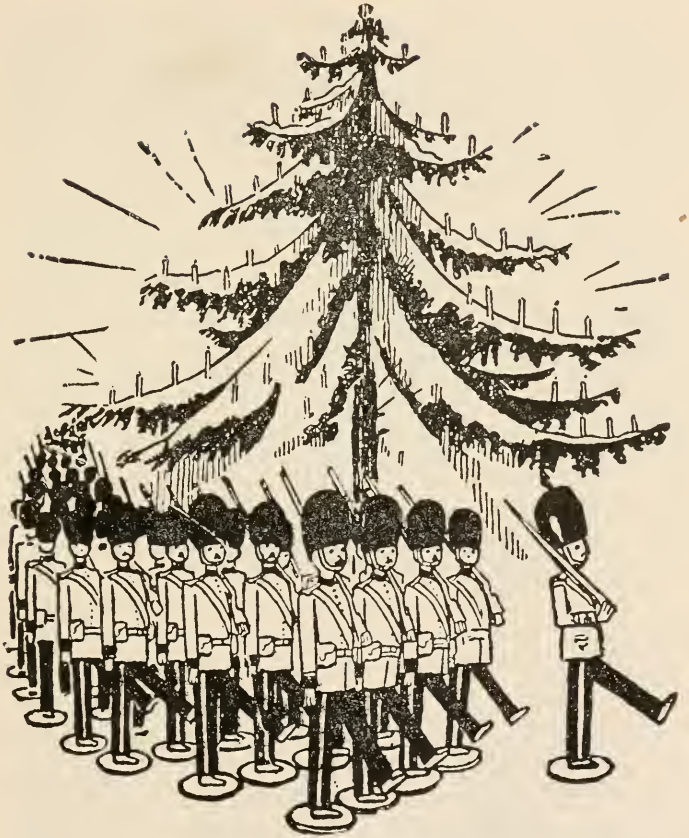
The heralds blew their trumpets again, and another picture appeared upon the screen. This time it was the little girl with the golden curls, who had been the first to notice the arrival of the Sleeping King.

"Number two," read out the Regent. "A walking doll."

The doll was lifted down from the table just as the soldiers had been, and immediately twenty or thirty smaller dolls suddenly appeared, and ranged themselves two and two behind her.

And the whole party of them marched three times round the Christmas tree, looking like a little bride and her wedding procession, for their clothes were very beautiful indeed.

Bluebell was so delighted with them that she was half inclined to envy the little girl who had won their leader, until she happened to look up among the branches over her head and saw her own golden doll waiting there for her. Then she began to wonder what her three wishes should be when the time came.



THE BAND STRUCK UP A LIVELY MILITARY MARCH, AND AWAY WENT THE SOLDIERS, ROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE, MARCHING TWO AND TWO IN SPLENDID TIME AND STEP AS THOUGH THEY HAD BEEN DRILLED TO DO IT ALL THEIR LIVES

As soon as the doll procession had made three circles round the tree, a herald picked up the leading one and placed her upon a branch, whereupon the others instantly vanished just as suddenly as they had come.

While the children were waiting to see what the next toy would be, Bluebell turned her attention to the twins; and discovered that Blob was busy making cake pellets, and shooting them with his finger and thumb at Theodore, who could not make out where on earth they came from. He was talking to one of the little girls, when ping! came a stinging little pellet on his cheek, and made him jump and turn quickly round. Long before he caught the fat boy's eye, Blob was looking in the opposite direction, as though he had nothing whatever to do with it.

Blib, in the meantime, had succeeded in crawling round behind the band, where he was engaged in trying to stick pins into the big drum when nobody was looking. But the vellum was too stiff for him, and the drummer happened to turn round and catch him in the act, whereupon he gave him a sounding box on the ears. So the thin boy left the band and retired into the corner with his brother, where they kept so quiet and still that Bluebell was quite certain they must be concocting some new kind of mischief. And she determined

to keep an eye on them; because, though she had never been to a Christmas party before, she was quite sure that they were behaving very badly, and she felt rather responsible for them as they had arrived there in her company.

HE WAS PRESENTLY LED OUT BY THE EAR BY ONE OF THE ROYAL PAGES, A BIG LUMP OF CAKE IN HIS HAND AND HIS MOUTH FULL.

The distribution of the presents went on as gaily as before, and each present, as it was announced, came to life and promenaded round the Christmas tree. And each time twenty or thirty smaller presents, exactly like it, suddenly appeared and followed in the procession, until it was hung

upon its branch, when they vanished just as quickly as they had come.

The woolly dogs ran round and barked; the cows wagged their heads and "mooed," and the jack-in-the-boxes jumped and grinned all round the tree: until the branches became more and more heavily laden, and the candles twinkled the brighter for their company. They were nice clean candles, which never spluttered or grew shorter, and they did not drop any grease or set fire to the branches. And Bluebell wondered why candles were not always made like that in everyday life. They would look much nicer, and would really be a great saving.

At last, when all the presents had been awarded, the tables were left quite empty, while the branches of the Christmas tree were as full as they could hold, and the king announced that the children could amuse themselves with Christmas games until they grew tired. After that, the winners of the golden presents should have their wishes granted them, then each of the others would be given his own gift, and it would be time for everybody to go home.

So there was a great discussion as to what the first game should be, and after every one had chattered and talked and suggested all at once, they decided on Blindman's Buff. There was

plenty of room, for the hall of the castle was so very large that the Christmas tree in the middle was not the least in the way. It was decided that the fat boy should be blindfolded first.

"If we put a bandage over your eyes, my boy, perhaps it will keep you out of mischief. Eh, what?" said the Regent.

So they produced a silk handkerchief and tied

BLIB, IN THE MEANTIME, HAD SUCCEEDED IN CRAWLING ROUND BEHIND THE BAND.

it carefully over Blob's eyes, after which they turned him three times round and told him to catch whom he could. Whereupon there was a rush of children in every direction, all laughing in great excitement, while the fat boy blundered about, trying to lay hands upon somebody.

When they found that they were pretty safe they soon grew bold, and came quite close to him. And Blib watched his opportunity until Theodore

was the nearest, and gave him a sudden push, so that Blob immediately captured him.

Theodore was very angry and began to protest that it was not fair, but they took no notice of what he said, and he was blindfolded in his turn. And he had a very poor time of it, for the twins kept creeping up behind him and pinching his legs and pulling his hair, until he nearly began to cry.

At last he pulled off his handkerchief and said he wouldn't play any more, whereupon the Regent interfered, and changed the game.

"What do you suggest, my dear?" he asked Bluebell.

And the little girl, who had been talking to Peter the cat in a corner, had a brilliant idea.

"Wouldn't it be rather fun," she asked, "if we were to play Puss in the Corner with a real cat in the middle to catch us?"

"What rot!" said the thin boy. "Cats can't play games."

"Kittens do," said the precocious boy, who was always ready to argue.

"Peter isn't a kitten," retorted Blib.

"He was once," said the precocious boy. "Perhaps he might remember."

"Perhaps you might eat thistles," suggested the fat boy pensively.

"Why?" asked Theodore.

"Because you've been a little ass," answered Blob, with his usual wink.

But Bluebell's idea pleased all the little girls so

THE WOOLLY DOGS RAN ROUND AND BARKED; THE COWS WAGGED THEIR HEADS AND "MOOED," AND THE JACK-IN-THE BOXES JUMPED AND GRINNED ALL ROUND THE TREE.

much that it was immediately adopted; and Peter purred gravely when the rules were explained to him, to show that he thoroughly understood. And he played the game very well indeed, for if the

children had all been mice he couldn't have been quicker in pursuing them. They couldn't make a move without being pounced upon, so that in about ten minutes they all had enough of it, and decided to try something else.

So they started Musical Chairs, and the band played so cleverly that no one could ever tell whether they were really going to stop or not. And at the end the twins, who had jostled everybody else out of the way, were left in together by themselves, with one chair between them. Then the drummer, who had caught Blib tampering with his instrument, whispered to his companions, and they set to work to pay him out. For they played straight through half a dozen tunes without stopping at all, until the boys got so tired and giddy that they could hardly stand. And the music was sometimes so very soft, that they kept on expecting the end, which never came, and all the other children stood round and laughed at them.

Next they played at Hunt the Slipper, and then at General Post until they were all so hot and tired that they wanted a quieter amusement, and tried Snapdragon for a change.

Blib and his brother snapped away and gorged and gobbled raisins until the salt came; when everybody's face turned green, and the flavor of the raisins was so unpleasant that they couldn't manage any more.

"Puss in the corner, with a real cat."

Then they played at Kiss in the Ring, and Honey Pots, and Oranges and Lemons, and they had games of forfeits; until, last of all, a monster flour pudding was brought in, and the old king placed a five-shilling piece upon the top of it.

Now, the object of a flour pudding, as every child knows, is to keep on cutting thin slices from it as long as you can, until the coin falls in. Then the child who cuts the last slice has to burrow in the flour with his mouth, and try to find it.

It was quite a solemn operation, for each of the children shaved off the thinnest possible slice, until it came to the turn of the twins. They both cut so deep, one on each side, that the pudding began to totter; and Theodore, who followed them, had no chance at all. As soon as he touched the knife, the five-shilling piece fell in, amidst shouts of delight from the twins and the excitement of the other children.

So Theodore began to sniff about very gingerly for the coin, when suddenly Blob gave him a push, and in he went. He came up again spluttering violently with his eyes and nose and mouth full of flour, very angry indeed. And when he saw the twins laughing at him, he got so furious that he picked up the dish and threw it at them.

The flour went all over the floor, and in the confusion a little Scotch boy picked up the five-

shilling piece and put it in his pocket without a word.

But the old king and the Regent had to interfere to prevent the boys from fighting; and while the flour was being swept away the heralds came forward with their silver trumpets. And just as they were about to sound them, the fat boy asked a riddle.

"Why are heralds the most conceited people in the world?" he said. And everybody gave it up.

"Because," said Blob with a wink, "they are always blowing their own trumpets!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"And now, children," said the king, when the confusion was over and Theodore had been pacified, "comes the most important event of the day. The owners of the golden presents will each express three wishes. And if their prize has been fairly won, the wish will be no sooner uttered than it will be granted them."

"I say," questioned Blib. "What will happen if the prizes weren't fairly won?"

"The owner will probably have every reason to regret it," answered the king.

"Shut up!" whispered Blob to his brother. "They'll never know the difference."

It was speedily decided that Bluebell, the owner of the golden doll and the awakener of the Sleeping King, should be the first to wish, and the excitement amongst the children became greater than ever. For nobody knew what she might ask for, or what the result would be, for no such sight had ever been witnessed before. They gathered round

the little girl in a large circle and waited eagerly, some of them even giving her advice, while she tried to make up her mind. She did not find it at all an easy task.

She looked at the poor old king, bent and doubled up with age, with his white beard and hair streaming around him, and her kind little heart was full of pity. She remembered that she really owed her golden doll to him, and she longed to show her gratitude.

But, oh! there were such heaps of other things she wanted too, and she was limited to only three. She felt, at the moment, that the strongest wish of all was for Dicky the shoeblack, whom she had missed so dreadfully since she came into Fairyland, and yet she dreaded to seem ungrateful to the poor old king.

The eager children crowded round her; the golden doll was placed in her hands, and the heralds blew a blast upon their silver trumpets.

And then, amidst a breathless silence, the little girl turned towards the king and spoke.

"I wish," she said, "that you were as young and strong and handsome as Dicky the shoeblack."

The words were no sooner out of her mouth than the wish came true. In sight of the whole assembly, for every eye was fixed upon him, the face and figure of the old king began to change.

The shriveled, wizened little body gradually became straight and strong and young; the white hair and the long beard dissolved and melted away; the wrinkles faded and disappeared; and in another moment there stepped down, from the throne beneath the golden canopy, Dicky the shoeblack himself.

His face was exactly the same as Bluebell had always known it; but his hair was beautifully brushed, and his hands were white and clean, and glittered with wonderful rings. He wore a gorgeous suit of crimson velvet, and shoes with diamond buckles, and by his side there hung a sword with a magnificent jeweled hilt.

Bluebell ran forward to meet him; and, regardless of court etiquette, she held up her face to be kissed.

"Oh, Dicky," she exclaimed, "you don't know how glad I am to see you again.

And the new king stooped and kissed her.

"My little sweetheart," he answered. "So long as we live we shall never be parted any more."

Then everybody came crowding round Dicky, whom they addressed as King Richard, and congratulated him on his accession to the throne. And they congratulated Bluebell on the result of her wish, because they were clever enough to see that she was a favorite with the new king, and good

courtiers always take notice of little things of that kind. But they did not seem in the least surprised at the change, for people who live in Fairyland have to accustom themselves to the whims of royalty,

HE WORE A GORGEOUS SUIT OF CRIMSON VELVET, AND SHOES WITH DIAMOND BUCKLES, AND BY HIS SIDE THERE HUNG A SWORD WITH A MAGNIFICENT JEWELED HILT.

even when they entail three different kings in one afternoon.

And when the congratulations were over, Dicky led Bluebell to a seat which was placed for her beside the royal throne; and there she sat down

and began to tell him all the wonderful adventures which had befallen her since the kind old gentleman, with a face like the Regent, had given her half-a-sovereign in the Strand on Christmas Eve.

She was surprised to find how royal and dignified Dicky had become since last she saw him, and she certainly thought he looked far more handsome and distinguished than either of his predecessors on the throne had done. But then she may have been a little prejudiced in his favor, because she had always looked upon Dicky the shoeblack as rather a hero.

In the middle of their conversation, the Regent, who had taken office under the new ruler without a murmur, suggested that, with his Majesty's permission, it would be well to let the twins get on with their wishes, as all the other children were becoming impatient to receive their own presents from the laden branches of the Christmas tree.

So the fat boy came solemnly forward and stood in the centre of the hall, with his golden violin in one hand and his fishing rod in the other. And all the children crowded round him as they had done round Bluebell, to hear what his wish might be.

"I wish," he said slowly, "that all the money in the world belonged to me, and that I was the richest man that ever lived."

Scarcely had he said it when he began to change slowly, in sight of them all, as the king had done, but with a very different result.

The clothes upon his back became the shabbiest, dirtiest old rags you can possibly imagine; his

INSTEAD OF THE RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD, HE HAD BECOME A PENNILESS CROSSING-SWEEPER.

shoes disappeared and left him with a pair of naked muddy feet: his face grew smeared and smudged with dust and grime, and the fishing-rod in his hand changed to a battered old broom. Instead of the richest man in the world, he had become a penniless crossing-sweeper.

The faces of the children as they watched the

change were very instructive. Their looks of surprise melted into broad grins, which gave place to peals of laughter and shouts of delight, when they realized what had happened. For Blob had succeeded in making himself so very unpopular amongst them, that they were quite enchanted to see him punished.

Theodore, the precocious boy, chuckled with glee.

"That is the result of drawing a prize unfairly," he explained to the other children.

It was more than the ragged crossing-sweeper could stand. He turned furiously on Theodore, and threw the golden violin at his head.

"Take the rotten old fiddle," he shouted, "and try and play a tune on it yourself."

Theodore ducked his head, which was quite unnecessary, for the violin would not have hit him. It simply flew straight across the hall from one end to the other, as though it had had a pair of wings, and vanished.

And King Richard cried:

"Silence for Blib's wish."

A herald took the golden box of colored lights and placed it in the thin boy's hand. And Blib, who had been roaring with laughter at his brother's discomfiture, stopped and scratched his head, whilst the children crowded round to see what would happen next.

"Wish me back again, you little beast!" shouted the fat boy.

"Sha'n't!" said his brother. "I'm not going to waste one of my chances on you."

"Don't talk so much," said Theodore. "Wish."

"Shut up, Freckles," answered the twins.

And there was a moment's silence before the thin boy spoke.

"I wish," he said at last, "that I was king in this castle, and that Richard was a shoeblack again."

But it was exactly the opposite which happened. King Richard never moved from his place on the throne beneath the golden canopy, but the thin boy himself began to change. Slowly his long thin cheeks turned grimy and black like his brother's, while the two halves of the crown which he still retained changed to a pair of blacking brushes. The golden present became a blacking box, and the thin boy's tweed suit a dirty, tattered, ragged old uniform of the Shoeblack Brigade.

"Another unfair prize," said the precocious Theodore.

"Shine your boots, sir?" asked Blib mechanically and quite against his will.

"No," said Theodore. "I wouldn't even let you touch them, you dirty little ragamuffin."

Now, strange as Bluebell's adventures and ex-

periences had been, it really seemed to her that this was the most extraordinary of them all. In the middle of the Christmas party, surrounded by all the smartest and best dressed children in the land, there stood the twins who had accompanied her in her wanderings through the Enchanted Glade, changed to a pair of ragged little street urchins.

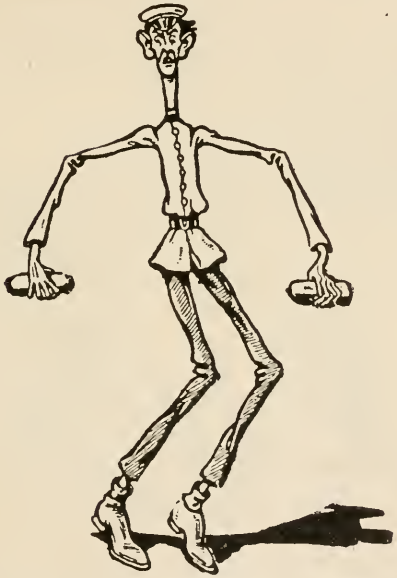
And one of them was a fat, podgy crossing-sweeper with a stump of a broom; the other a long, thin shoeblack in a tattered uniform, with a pair of dirty blacking brushes in the place of the sceptre he had wished to possess.

She knew how badly they had behaved and how rude and unpopular they had been, and she realized how unfairly they had drawn the golden presents which had brought their punishments upon them; and yet, in her kind little heart, she could not help a feeling of pity for them in their sorry plight. But all the other children had drawn aside from the grimy pair of twins, who stood alone in the centre of the great hall under the shadow of the lighted Christmas tree, when the king's voice cried:

"Silence for Bluebell's second wish."

Again the herald handed her the golden doll, and she stepped forward from Dicky's side. The fat boy swept a path before her as she walked, and

his brother ran forward to try and black her shoes. But as she had bare feet, of course he found he couldn't.



THE GOLDEN PRESENT BECAME A BLACKING BOX, AND THE THIN BOY'S TWEED SUIT A DIRTY, TATTERED, RAGGED OLD UNIFORM OF THE SHOEBLACK BRIGADE.

Now up to this very moment the little girl had never given her second wish a thought; she had been far too much interested and excited in all the changes which had taken place around her. But

the sight of her own bare feet suddenly reminded her that her own dress was almost as ragged and tattered as were those of the twins, and the contrast between her frock and King Richard's royal clothes struck her as strangely incongruous. The words came to her lips almost before she realized that she was speaking.

"Oh, Dicky," she cried, "I wish I had a beautiful dress like yours."

And, immediately, her wish was gratified. The shabby frock gave place to a wonderful gown of white satin and real lace. The tumbled hair was dressed upon the top of her head, and surmounted by a tiara of diamonds and three white feathers. Her little bare legs were encased in white silk stockings and lovely satin shoes, and her bare arms in beautiful white kid gloves with eighteen buttons. There was a necklace of pearls around her neck, an ostrich feather fan in one hand, and a bouquet of crimson roses in the other.

It was the most magnificent dress she had ever seen in her life, and exactly like one of which she had once caught a glimpse in the carriage of a beautiful lady in London, on her way to a Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace.

Dicky the shoeblack stepped down from the royal throne, and, kneeling at Bluebell's feet, he bent and kissed her gloved hand.

"My little Queen," he said.
And all the children cheered and shouted, while

THE SHABBY FROCK GAVE PLACE TO A WONDERFUL GOWN OF WHITE SATIN AND REAL LACE. THE TUMBLED HAIR WAS DRESSED UPON THE TOP OF HER HEAD AND SURMOUNTED BY A TIARA OF DIAMONDS AND THREE WHITE FEATHERS.

the heralds blew their silver trumpets, and the band struck up a wedding march.

"And now," continued King Richard, "you

have still one wish left to gratify. Think well before you name it, for it is the last. We have wealth, and love, and youth, and happiness. Is there anything else in the wide world that you can desire? If so, name it and it shall be yours."

The golden doll lay upon one of the empty tables where the herald had placed it, and the little girl was reaching out her hand to grasp it, when suddenly, above her head, there came a sound of tinkling silver bells, the music that heralded the approach of the Fairy of the Forest.

And from the roof of the great hall she came floating gently down, in glittering tinsel as before, and the bright light upon her wand shone clearer even than the lights which twinkled upon the Christmas tree. She paused in front of Bluebell, and the children stood and stared at her in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Little Bluebell," said the fairy in her soft sweet voice, "you have but one more wish. Pause, and consider it carefully. Is there any one in the world so near and dear to you that you are ready to consider their happiness before your own?"

And then, for the first time, Bluebell remembered the two little sisters whom she had left, fast asleep in the garret in Drury Lane, on Christmas Eve. Through all her strange experiences, her mind had been so full of new sights, and sounds,

and scenes that she had never given them one single thought. The tears started to her eyes.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she cried. "How could I have forgotten them?"

THE REGENT, BUTTONING A FUR COAT ABOUT HIS NECK.

"Don't cry, little girl," answered the fairy.

"It is not yet too late. You have only acted as hundreds of others would have done in your place. For, alas!" and the fairy sighed, "every girl in the world has two wishes closest to her heart. One of them is for a lover, and the other for beautiful

clothes. These two have been granted to you, but it is still within your power to bring your little sisters happiness with the third."

"Give me the golden doll," cried Bluebell eagerly, "and let me wish again."

She turned to the table where it had lain, but the fat boy was there before her, with the golden doll tight grasped within his podgy hand.

"Now," he cried, waving it high above his head, "we'll pay her out!"

"Seize him," shouted the king. "Seize him, and take the golden doll away."

But it was too late. The fat boy sprang upon the table with the doll held high in the air, and before a herald could lay a hand upon him he had shouted at the top of his voice:

"I wish that meddlesome little girl was back again at the place she came from."

And, even in the hands of the dirty, ragged crossing-sweeper, the magic power of the golden doll held good.

Before Bluebell could realize what had happened, the Christmas tree and the eager crowd of children began to fade and disappear. The walls of the great hall receded slowly farther and farther on every side, and in the doorway of the castle appeared a carriage with a pair of bright bay horses. The Regent, buttoning a fur coat about his neck,

hurried into it, while the fat boy sprang to the box-seat and seized the reins. His brother slammed the door and jumped up beside him, and the carriage drove rapidly off into the blinding snow.

The fairy floated upwards, to the tinkling music of the silver bells; and the throne, with its golden canopy, grew misty and indistinct. And then, as the little girl stretched forth her arms, in a vain attempt to reach her royal lover, and called on Dicky the shoeblack for his help, there came the sound of a mighty crash—

* * * * *

And Bluebell awoke!

CHAPTER XIV.

She found herself sitting in the rickety chair in her garret in Drury Lane, with Peter the cat by her side, and the glimmer of the dying fire before her. It was Christmas morning, and outside in the snowy streets the church bells were ringing their joyous peal. Behind her, in the bed, lay her two little sisters, sound asleep.

Bluebell rubbed her eyes and wondered if she were really awake or not.

"Oh, what a wonderful dream!" she exclaimed aloud. "I only wish it had lasted a minute longer."

For that is the way with dreams, they always come to an end just at the moment when something very interesting is going to happen.

But it had all been so vivid and so lifelike, that she could scarcely believe that all the wonderful things she had dreamed of were only fancies, after all. Even in the dim light of the winter morning, she almost thought that she could see the quaint

figures of the idle schoolboys; Dicky the shoeblack in his royal robes; the plump form of the Regent, and the Fairy of the Forest in her dress of glittering tinsel.

But the only reality of them all was her faithful little friend Peter the cat; and when she caught sight of him she stooped and kissed his furry nose. Beside her, on the floor, lay the two books which constituted the children's library: a cheap edition of *Alice in Wonderland*, and the tattered old dog's-eared fairy book, which contained the story of the Sleeping King. And then the little girl began to understand how all the wonderful things she had seen had come into her head.

While she was still thinking over them, the little sisters awoke, and they were so eager and excited about the presents which Santa Claus had sent them that they never even noticed that Bluebell had not been to bed all night. So she dressed them and gave them their breakfast; and then, as it was Christmas day, she determined to take a holiday and to help the little girls to play with their new toys. But first she made the bed and tidied up the garret, and Mrs. Hearty sent her up a scuttle full of real coals to make a Christmas fire with. And of course she had to assure herself that the money which she had received from the old gentleman in the Strand was really and truly there, be-

cause her dream had made such an impression upon her that she was almost afraid the half-sovereign might prove to be a part of it.

But she found her money was safe enough; and there were some more wonderful things to follow; for on that memorable Christmas day Bluebell had a real adventure, which was quite as curious in its way as those which she had only dreamed of.

For Mrs. Hearty came bustling up into the room in a great state of excitement.

"Whatever do you think, my dear?" she gasped, as soon as she opened the door. "There's a carriage and pair standing outside in the street, and a fat little gentleman down in my parlor who has been asking all sorts of questions about you. And nothing will please him but he must be allowed to come upstairs and see you. It must be him as gave you the half-a-sovereign last night," she added.

For when she was excited, Mrs. Hearty's grammar was not so good as her heart.

And Bluebell was quite in a flutter of nervousness and excitement herself, when she heard her visitor come puffing and tramping up the steep staircase. It was a much greater ordeal to her even than her interview with the Yellow Dwarf had been. There came a knock at the door, and

in trotted the merry little old gentleman whom she had last seen in the Strand.

His jolly round face beamed with the cold and

SHE FOUND HERSELF SITTING IN THE RICKETY CHAIR IN HER GARRET IN DRURY LANE, WITH PETER THE CAT BY HER SIDE, AND THE GLIMMER OF THE DYING FIRE BEFORE HER.

with benevolence, his golden spectacles were perched upon his perky little nose, and his fur coat was buttoned up to his chin. He bustled into

the garret like a breath of fresh air, and he stooped and kissed the little flower-girl.

"A merry Christmas to you, Miss Bluebell," he jerked out, for he was quite out of breath after climbing so many stairs. "So this is where you live, and these are the little sisters. Eh, what? Bless my soul, what a steep staircase! May I sit down, my dear?"

And he plumped down upon the rickety chair where Bluebell had slept all night, and he very nearly broke it, for he was no light weight. And he kissed the two little sisters and took them on his knee and talked to them; and he was so kind and cheery that they were not in the least frightened of him; and they showed him the presents which Bluebell had bought them the night before.

"So that's how you spent your money, little girl. Eh, what?" he asked with a chuckle.

"Oh, please, sir," said Bluebell, "they did not cost very much; and I have plenty left, for Mrs. Hearty gave me back my rent. And I spent some of it in buying a Christmas dinner," she added.

"You're a very kind little girl," answered the old gentleman, "and I have a suggestion to make to you. Instead of eating your Christmas dinner at home, I want you all three to come to my house and have it with me. Eh, what?"

And though Bluebell protested, for she was

rather shy about going to a stranger's house, he would take no denial. He had set his heart upon it, he said, and they really must do it just to please him. Their own dinner would keep quite well for another day, and as for their clothes being shabby, that was all nonsense; for there would be no one to see them except himself.

Finally Mrs. Hearty was called in and consulted, and the old gentleman talked so volubly that she very soon came round to his way of thinking.

"My name is Mr. Joplin," he said, "and everybody knows me. Most of them say I'm mad, but little Bluebell will find there's method in my madness. Eh, what?"

And so it was finally settled that they should go; and the old gentleman went puffing and wheezing downstairs, followed by Bluebell and her two little sisters. And you can imagine the sensation which the grand carriage, and its pair of bright bay horses, made in the street. There were heads looking out of all the windows to see who it belonged to.

On the box sat the fat coachman, and he was so extraordinarily like the boy of her dream that Bluebell could scarcely refrain from talking to him. And on the pavement, beside the carriage door, stood the long, thin footman with a face like

Blib. And as soon as Mr. Joplin and the children were safely inside the carriage, the footman mounted to his place, the coachman whipped up his horses, and away they went.

It seemed to Bluebell that no carriage in the world could ever have rolled along so smoothly as that one did, and her two little sisters simply sat with their faces pressed against the window panes, looking out at all the wonders of the snowy streets.

They bowled along down the Strand at a fast trot, and through many streets and squares, until at last they turned into one on the corner of which Bluebell saw the name Grosvenor Square written up. And there the carriage pulled up in front of one of the grandest houses, and the footman jumped down and rang the bell.

As soon as the door was opened, Mr. Joplin and the children went in. And they found themselves in a large hall with a Turkey carpet on the floor, and lots of pictures on the walls, and there were tall figures in armor which interested the little girls immensely.

And there was a very stately gentleman in black clothes, whom they afterwards discovered was the butler; and there were three tall footmen exactly like the one who had sat upon the box-seat of the carriage.

Mr. Joplin led the children into a beautifully

furnished drawing-room, and he chattered and talked away until they were all quite at their ease, and forgot to be shy of him. And he told them that he was a lonely old bachelor, with more money than he knew what to do with, and that his chief pleasure in life was to see little children enjoying themselves. He had grown tired, he said, of eating his Christmas dinner alone in his great empty house; and though he had no children of his own, he longed to hear the sound of happy laughter and childish voices, in the great rooms and echoing passages.

AND ON THE PAVEMENT BESIDE THE CARRIAGE DOOR STOOD THE LONG THIN FOOTMAN WITH A FACE LIKE BLIB.

And so, last night, when he had met little Bluebell in the Strand, a sudden idea had occurred to him, and he had asked her for her name and address. Then he had been to Mrs. Hearty to learn something about the little flower-girl, and the landlady had spoken so well of her kindness to the little sisters, that

he had made up his mind to see what could be done for them.

When Mr. Joplin had got as far as that, a gong sounded downstairs, and the butler came into the room to announce that dinner was on the table. So they all went down to the dining-room, where a lovely fire was blazing in the grate; and there was a table spread with glittering silver and glass, and on the snowy tablecloth was a Christmas feast such as the children had never even heard of.

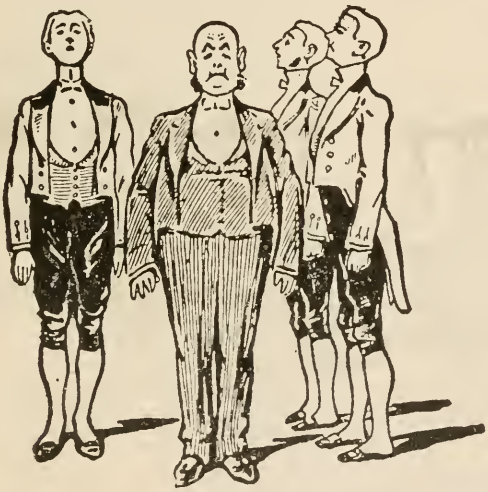
There were four places laid, and the butler and the three footmen waited upon the children while they dined upon roast turkey and plum pudding and mince pies, with cakes, and oranges, and nuts, and apples for dessert. And they pulled crackers and put on the paper caps which they found inside them, and each of the little girls had a sip of champagne to wish each other a merry Christmas in.

And when it was all over and the servants had left the room, they drew their chairs round the blazing fire, and the old gentleman smoked a cigar and drank a glass of port, while he told them wonderful stories of countries and people they had never heard of.

And at last he said:

"Now, little Miss Bluebell, that you have been

to pay me a visit, how would you like to come and live here altogether with your two sisters? You shall be brought up as if you were my own children, for I will adopt you, and you will never know



AND THERE WAS A VERY STATELY GENTLEMAN IN BLACK CLOTHES, WHOM THEY AFTERWARDS DISCOVERED WAS THE BUTLER; AND THERE WERE THREE TALL FOOTMEN, EXACTLY LIKE THE ONE WHO HAD SAT UPON THE BOX-SEAT OF THE CARRIAGE.

want again. For I am a lonely old bachelor, with no one in the world to care for, and I should like to know that I had succeeded in making some one happy before I die. Eh, what?"

He coughed and choked and blew his nose and wiped his spectacles, and added, so softly that they could scarcely hear him:

"The sound of happy laughter and childish voices, in the empty rooms and echoing passages."

AND THEY PULLED CRACKERS AND PUT ON THE PAPER CAPS WHICH THEY FOUND INSIDE THEM, AND EACH OF THE LITTLE GIRLS HAD A SIP OF CHAMPAGNE TO WISH EACH OTHER A MERRY CHRISTMAS IN.

The wonderful proposal had quite taken away Bluebell's breath, and she hardly knew how to reply or what to say.

"Please, sir," she answered at last, "it is very kind indeed of you to ask us, and we would love to come. But what should we do with Peter the cat? We couldn't leave him, you know."

"Certainly not, my dear, certainly not," said

Mr. Joplin. "Bring him with you. Eh, what?"

"Then there's Dicky the shoeblack," continued

AND ALL THE CHILDREN IN THE STREET GATHERED ROUND TO SEE THEM START, AND MRS. HEARTY CRIED WHEN SHE BADE HER LITTLE LODGER GOOD-BY.

Bluebell. "I don't know what I should do if I thought I should never see him again."

"And who is Dicky the shoeblack!" asked the old gentleman.

It seemed quite strange to Bluebell that he should not know, because her dream was still so vivid that it only appeared a few hours since the old gentleman, in the dress of the Regent, had been one of Dicky's humble subjects.

However, she explained as well as she could, and Mr. Joplin promised that if Dicky proved to be a good boy, he would charge himself with his education, and that he would be allowed sometimes to come and see his little friend.

And so the wonderful visit came to an end, and the children were driven back again to Drury Lane in the grand carriage, with the bay horses and the fat coachman.

But a few days later it returned again, and it took Bluebell and her little sisters and Peter the cat to their new home. And all the children in the street gathered round to see them start, and Mrs. Hearty cried when she bid her little lodger good-bye.

And in that grand house in Grosvenor Square those happy little children are living now; they have everything that they can possibly wish for, for Mr. Joplin is the kindest old gentleman in London, though there are plenty of people who say that he is madder than ever.

But of all their beautiful toys and books the children still have no greater favorites than *Alice*

"Bluebell and her little sisters in their new home."

in Wonderland and the tattered old dog's-eared fairy book. And the greatest treat of all to the little sisters is to hear Bluebell's own original version of her visit to the Enchanted Glade; for, though they know it by heart, they are never tired of listening to the Story of the Sleepy King.

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